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LETTERS.

BAD BEARS NEWS

Lowell, Mass.

Regarding "No Miracle in Lowell" by Andrew Kopkind [March 30]: I find it inconceivable that the author, in enumerating the many changes that Senator Tsongas produced in Lowell, likens the results to "Yellowstone or Yosemite. Without the bears."

It was only because of Senator Tsongas's intervention in an agricultural appropriations bill that funds were provided for the establishment of the Lowell Institute for Ursine Studies, now widely regarded (see *U.S. News* of Feb. 16, 1988) as the number-one center of ursine research in the United States. I can assure you that we are not confined to computer studies of bears, though we take considerable pride in having pioneered in developing that field, particularly in simulations of bear depredations against honey-producing hives, statutorily specified under the U.S.D.A. grant for this institute.

To the contrary, in our forest annex, we have in residence at the moment fourteen bears. Admittedly, they are not within the city limits of Lowell, but that point is not relevant to the present discussion, as they are no more than twenty-five minutes from downtown. On one occasion for a festival at town hall, we delivered a bear, on short notice, in little more than that time. By any reasonable measure, Lowell is not "without the bears." I hope you will publish this letter as a correction to a serious error. *William Seagraves*

KOPKIND REPLIES

Guilford, Vt.

Readers have a right to know that Professor Seagraves is no ivory-tower scholar but the same "Smokey" Seagraves employed for many years by the U.S. Park Service and responsible for the notorious "Don't Feed the Bears" campaign, which resulted in widespread starvation, alienation and, ultimately, violence among this codependent species. Seagraves lost his job when he came under investigation by the I.R.S. for listing several bears (by name) for deductions as his "children," resulting in a net loss of income for over twenty years. It is widely believed in Lowell that Senator Tsongas managed to quash an indictment against him. Then, in a perfect example of the public-private "revolving door" pattern, replicating the whirligig movements of Tsongas from the U.S. Senate to Boston Edison to the Democratic presidential contest, Seagraves landed on his feet at UMass Lowell, where he continues his predations on the noble bear.

The more properly termed ursine-Americans (i.e., bears who reside in the United States) of Lowell are actually kept nowhere near the city, but are imprisoned in a barren and dismal pen *across the state line* in the Pheasant Lane Mall parking lot in Nashua, New Hampshire, where the enlightened laws of Massachusetts regarding the protection of our ursine cousins do not apply. This mall, of course, is one of the principal reasons for Lowell's recent decline: Residents have abandoned the expensive boutiques of the city for the cheaper shops in tax-free New Hampshire. Smokey and his bears are thus contributing to the failure of the experiment in urban renaissance undertaken by Tsongas.

And by the way, the "festival" Seagraves cites was in reality a rowdy brawl staged by Tsongas on a Greek national day, during which the poor bear was forced to drink ouzo and retsina, turned feral and vicious, mauled several small children and had to be put down. So much for ursine studies in Lowell.

Andrew Kopkind

ONLY A TOOL

Palo Alto, Calif.

"Big Business Goes to School" by John S. Friedman [Feb. 17] places the Institute for Research on Learning in the position of being a pawn in a large draconian infiltration of business leaders into the sacred arena of education for only one purpose—to make a profit. Friedman misses the point about I.R.L.: We were established to bring together an interdisciplinary team of first-class research scientists, working in a collaborative atmosphere, to uncover what constitutes successful learning practice in all settings, but with a focus on schools and the workplace. We are involved in technology, but only as it serves the larger learning research agenda. Technology is only a tool to assist the learning process—an important tool, an underutilized and misunderstood tool, but only a tool. Our agenda is to do research in action, in a manner that brings important insights on learning into our institutions. I believe Friedman is naïve at best and astoundingly wrongheaded at worst, and that the facts surrounding the establishment of I.R.L. are simply wrong. *Peter Henschel*

FRIEDMAN REPLIES

Sharon, Conn.

As big business enters the education arena, the danger arises that free inquiry will be stifled and values shaped by corporate goals. It is plausible, nonetheless, that a variety of organizations and institutes with worthy agendas and corporate support, such as I.R.L., will develop useful learning and research tools. But, overall, will corporations invest hundreds of millions of dollars without some view toward substantial profit? The concern is that the new technology that business wants to introduce into the world of education threatens to reduce the number of teachers and curb creativity and open-mindedness.

I stand by the facts of my description of the I.R.L. It did receive $5 million in seed money in 1987 from Xerox. Although it has a broad research agenda on learning, it does specialize in new ways to use technology in the classroom. The institute's researchers are described in *Benchmark* (Fall 1991), a quarterly magazine published by Xerox, as "seeking ways to combine technology with a practical approach" to make "a meaningful contribution toward solving America's educational problems." My article examines how Chris Whittle and his corporate allies in their Edison Project are planning profits from their new schools. Along the way, many research institutes will be called upon to provide expertise. *John S. Friedman*

FATHER HITCHENS

Swarthmore, Pa.

I first encountered Mother Teresa in 1976 in Calcutta. She did not call herself "Mother" Teresa. Others did, including myself. I did not find her to be a "leathery old saint" as "Father" Hitchens did ["Minority Report," April 13]. She seemed to be a selfless person trying to do good.

All human beings are—human, including Nobel Peace laureates. Perhaps Hitchens is an exception. Laureates Albert Schweitzer and Martin Luther King Jr. have had their blemishes publicized by journalists. Norman Cousins once wrote, "It is not so much what [Schweitzer] has done for others, but what others have done because of him and the power of his example."

And so it is with Mother Teresa. She has inspired many of us to value charitable work. I prefer to join a political party or the peace movement and try to change structures. I am for free choice. Mother Teresa's vocation leads her to a different approach. Who am I to criticize her? Hitchens does so, and calls her a "fraud"; he makes more of a fool of himself than of her. *Homer A. Jack*

OINK

Richmond, Calif.

As a pro-choice butch, and *Nation* subscriber since . . . the 60s? I forget, I strongly protest Christopher Hitchens's homophobic slur in his column on Mother Teresa: "her butch style. . . . " Neither I nor any of my butch (or femme) sisters possesses any similarity to the policies or practices of the devious and evil individual described by Hitchens. (But then, no one ever kissed our feet.) While Hitchens provides some useful political commentary, as regards women he's a patriarchal pig.

Mildred Dickemann

HELLO, LARRY?

New Haven, Conn.

I appreciated Jerry Brown's deeply penetrating interview with Alexander Cockburn and Andrew Kopkind ["Late Night With Jerry Brown," April 20]. It took a persistent and skilled inquisitor like Brown to get to the bottom of what Kopkind and Cockburn really think about the issues. Maybe next week you could have Larry Agran interview Calvin Trillin. *Steve Ury*

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EDITORIALS.

City of Ashes

"L.A. is America—only worse," Paul Jacobs said a generation ago, and neither place has improved much since then. What Los Angeles may be, exactly, is America in the future, the city where the crises that will afflict the whole nation are first seen, and the public laboratory where remedies are tested. Everything from skateboards to smog started in the L.A. basin, but those horrors are quaint compared with the defining disaster of racism, repression and riots that pervades the place and that without doubt will be visited on other centers. How both local and national leaders analyze this critical dynamic, how they talk about it, understand it and approach it could determine how America survives in the next century.

The signs so far do not inspire much hope. In the wake of the explosion of anger and revenge that followed the Rodney King verdict, leading political figures weighed in with bromides and platitudes. George Bush did mention "root causes" in his national TV appearance, but his plan to attack them consists mainly of Housing Secretary Jack Kemp's package of privatization measures for public housing and of tax breaks for ghetto businesses. Anything more serious presumably falls into the category of "failed liberal programs of the 1960s and 1970s," which White House spokesman Marlin Fitzwater cynically blamed for the troubles in South Central L.A.

Bill Clinton seemed to be waiting for the hourly polling data to determine on which rock-solid principles he would ground his program for "fundamental change." First he blamed

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Reagan-Bush policies (or lack of them) for causing the conditions conducive to riot, but lest his white middle-class constituency get the wrong idea, he quickly emphasized his commitment to law and order. The truth is, he has ignored the urban poor as assiduously as has Bush, and for the same reason: The votes are in the suburbs—or so Clinton and the Democratic Leadership Council believe.

Mayor Tom Bradley, a black former L.A. cop who was elected precisely to divert the rage and dull the demands of the people who rioted, talked about throwing more money into the ghettos, and he appointed Olympic *Wunderkind* Peter Ueberroth to head a committee to draw up the rules and manage that game. Governor Pete Wilson is once again submerged by events, Police Chief Daryl Gates is consumed with his own ego and his mischievous part in the sorry story, and not one of them has the foggiest notion of what to do next.

It would be a mistake to think that L.A.'s racial, ethnic and class problems are contained in the political arena. While the failure of official policy—Republican and Democratic, presidential, Congressional, state and local—is striking, it is only part of a picture framed by the predations of economic and social forces quite beyond the reach of mere politicians. L.A. is one of the most segregated cities this side of Johannesburg, which it resembles in frightening ways. The decline and flight of industries that summoned and employed many blacks during and after World War II has left a large population confined in forgotten townships, or perhaps internal refugee camps. Education is so inferior, prospects are so dim, the contempt of the white community is so strong and the culture of the black community is so estranged that "gangsta" warfare seems almost progressive by comparison, or inevitable. At least it has put the case on the table again, if only for a few weeks.

The authorities respond to the conditions they have created with military means of increasing sophistication. The omnipresent helicopters with their searchlights and loudspeakers invading the streets of South Central symbolize both the power of the majority to repress the minority and the refusal of the privileged to give up anything to the disadvantaged. The kind of change it would take to remove the helicopters, restore peace, deliver justice and resolve differences is outside the competence and imagination of anyone now on the scene.

Americans like to believe there are solutions to all problems and answers to all questions, but the ones raised by the L.A. riots may be true stumpers. Absent a radical transformation in U.S. politics, similar commotions will occur in other cities, more repression will produce worse reactions and—unlike in the movies—the "Grand Canyon" that separates black from white, the privileged from the bereft, will widen with the years. Fred Allen once said L.A. is a great place to live if you're an orange. It's not bad if you're a white, either. But it can be hell if you're anything else.

NEXT WEEK

MIKE DAVIS on
L.A.'s Days of Rage

AND COMING UP . . .

MARCUS RASKIN on
Dismantling the C.I.A.

Offshore Libel

Free expression can disturb the powerful anywhere. Fortunately, the right to that expression is still protected in this country, despite the wishes of a crony of Rajiv Gandhi who claims he was libeled by a small New York newspaper. The paper, a weekly called *India Abroad*, had reported on a story from Sweden that named Gandhi's friend Ajitabh Bachchan as a bagman in the biggest corruption scandal in India since independence.

The story has never been disproved. It was also carried by dozens of major papers in India, and Bachchan did not sue. Bachchan, however, won a judgment in London last year against *India Abroad* under libel laws that place the burden of proof on the defendant and favor wealthy plaintiffs over publishers. Earlier this year Bachchan asked the New York State Supreme Court to make *India Abroad* pay about $70,000 of the judgment. To his lawyers, executing the British court's verdict was a matter of comity between nations, like recognizing a Mexican divorce.

On April 13, Judge Shirley Fingerhood rejected Bachchan's motion for a summary judgment. She said that the English common law standard for libel was antithetical to the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution. Whether or not Bachchan is a public figure, Fingerhood said, the allegation against him was a matter of public concern. She ruled that the libel judgment was unenforceable here because "placing the burden of proving truth upon media defendants who publish speech of public concern" has an unconstitutional chilling effect.

Big newspapers like *The New York Times* supported *India Abroad* as friends of the court. They were worried that enforcement would inspire forum shopping—bringing suit wherever a country's law favors the plaintiff, even though the publication's circulation there is minimal. It is no fluke, however, that this particular case involved a small paper. Judge Fingerhood's ruling, which Bachchan probably will appeal, protects not only multinational media giants but also immigrant or exiled journalists who in times of crisis can be crucial to reporting the news of the countries they come from.

Bachchan's suit stemmed from a January 1990 news story in *Dagens Nyheter*, a Stockholm daily. The story said money from five previously identified Swiss bank accounts had been funneled into a sixth account controlled by Bachchan. The money was already reported to have been kickbacks in a huge deal for 155-mm. howitzers between Rajiv Gandhi's government and the Swedish arms maker AB Bofors.

Ajitabh and his brother, the swashbuckling film hero Amitabh Bachchan, had been close friends of Gandhi since childhood. This was not the first time their name was linked to kickbacks involving the former Indian prime minister, who

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was assassinated a year ago this month. Although Ajitabh claims to have been exonerated by a Swiss magistrate, the allegation about the sixth account has not been publicly contradicted. But *Dagens Nyheter* settled with Bachchan just as his suit against it went to trial in London in July 1990.

Gopal Raju, the publisher of *India Abroad* (where I worked from 1987 to 1990), says he is not convinced "either way" of Ajitabh's possible role as Rajiv's money handler. For some twenty years his newspaper has provided independent coverage of India and other countries in southern Asia. Raju says he was angered when Bachchan charged that he was allied with Gandhi's political enemies. He refused to follow the Swedes' lead and apologize for re-reporting their story.

The man who wrote that story, Bo Andersson, has reported on the Bofors affair since it first came to light five years ago. He has called his paper's settlement with Bachchan a "bad mistake." He told me in a phone interview he believes he was "misled or betrayed by well-placed sources in India" but also that there were "still a lot of questions" about Ajitabh and the Bofors deal.

In February 1990 *Dagens Nyheter* ran a story by Andersson that said aides close to Gandhi had negotiated kickbacks for their Prime Minister. Andersson quoted an unnamed former official of the holding company that controls Bofors who said about $53 million was paid into the first five Swiss accounts. More money would have been paid as the multiyear contract matured, the story said, but the payments stopped when the press discovered the scandal in April 1987.

Lal Krishan Advani, a Hindu-chauvinist politician who is the leader of the opposition in the Indian Parliament, told me in January that "the trail may have gone cold" in tracing the Bofors payments. He added, however, that "the issue affected a major general election and that in itself has become a kind of constraint" against wholesale bribe taking as India opens up in a big way to Western arms manufacturers. If that is so, it is because of the work of the press.

The *India Abroad* case is a reminder that the principle of free expression has specific political repercussions. Judge Fingerhood's decision removes a potential deterrent to full discovery of the Bofors affair at a time when the story is surfacing again. Appeals courts should uphold the ruling and protect the press in this country from the need to tailor their stories to the narrow libel laws of England or other countries. That protection provides safe haven for information that can be vitally important in any number of nations. ANDY MCCORD

Andy McCord lives in New York City and writes frequently on India and Southern Asia.

Bad Memories

France is still feeling the shock of a legal decision destined to induce collective amnesia. The Paris appellate court dismissed war crimes charges against Paul Touvier, leader of the pro-Nazi militia, which aided and abetted the Gestapo in Lyons during World War II.

The case of Touvier is extraordinary. Now 77, he was sentenced to death in absentia just after the war. He managed to hide for years and was protected by members of the Catholic clergy, including an archbishop. Trying to rally and unite the French right after the student and worker revolt of 1968, President Georges Pompidou granted Touvier a pardon in 1971. "Crimes against humanity," however, are by law not pardonable offenses. Touvier was prosecuted a second time, sheltered again by the Catholic clergy and caught only in 1989. Now it was the turn of the Paris judges to do the dirty work. They discarded five of the accusations against Touvier as not proven. The sixth, the execution of seven Jewish hostages, could not be so dismissed, so they decided it was not a "crime against humanity" because Marshal Pétain's Vichy regime, unlike the Nazis, did not have a plan of extermination.

Thus, to whitewash Vichy, the judges had to become historians and special pleaders, skillfully forgetting that the militia had been an instrument of the Nazis. Why did they do it? Presumably, to prevent a proper debate on collaboration, on the extent to which French officialdom and the bourgeoisie worked together with the Nazis. If Touvier, with blood on his hands, gets off scot-free, then the two members of the establishment whose trial for collaboration is always being postponed (René Bousquet and Maurice Papon, wartime police officials in Paris and Bordeaux) can assume they will die quietly in their homes—unless there is an outcry provoked by this shameful verdict that forces the highest court of appeal to reverse it very fast.

Is it worth it to drag these guilty old men into court? Yes, for the sake of a nation's political sanity. At the end of the war, after a brief period of purges, the French refused to examine their record. A clever syllogism—de Gaulle was a resister; de Gaulle is France; therefore, the whole of France resisted—allowed them to push awkward memories into the unconscious, where they festered. Naturally, the rise of Jean-Marie Le Pen and his xenophobic National Front has its own economic and social causes. But the revival of racism, this time anti-Arab even more than anti-Jew, is not unconnected with this refusal to examine the past. Amnesia is a very dangerous disease for nations as well as individuals.

DANIEL SINGER

Daniel Singer is The Nation*'s Europe correspondent.*

★

On Force Used By Police In An Arrest For A Traffic Violation

To me, it's really quite depressive
To see what level's not *excessive.*

Calvin Trillin

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MINORITY REPORT.

CHRISTOPHER HITCHENS

Toronto

Having just left Los Angeles during its nonconvulsion over the gassing of Robert Alton Harris, I felt slightly odd and herbivorous at finding myself in Canada during the real convulsion over the reverse frame-up (or whatever we agree to call the latest judicial outrage) of Rodney King. The usual thoughts were summoned to the mind. If this is how a victim is treated when chance permits a videotape of his ordeal, do you care to imagine how he would have been treated *without* such a video? Policemen who send gloating radio messages about primates after the deed, and who then gather to make crude witticisms around the bed of the victim, appear to have a confidence in "their" American institutions that is possessed by very few of their fellows. And where was Chief law-and-order Gates when he was ostensibly "needed"? Is mayhem, like war, the health of the state? On present form, I would presume so. My Canadian hosts did their best not to be sanctimonious.

Anyway, I was up here in part to talk about the health issue. There are two modern "white" societies upon which American conservatives have always felt an urgent, insecure need to look down. Canada is one of them (the other being Sweden). It irritates the authorities in Washington, who, until the Harris Wofford vote in Pennsylvania, were unaware of the concern felt by their subjects about health care, to be told that anyone might have a concept superior to the American Way. Nonetheless, the rogue impression that Canada does better is now fairly widespread among Americans, and hacks are being paid to put this idea down.

On April 21, for instance, there was a *MacNeil-Lehrer* debate between Bob Rae, the social democratic Premier of Ontario, and Gail Wilensky. I had no idea that Wilensky used to direct the Health Care Financing Administration, a federal agency that oversees Medicare and Medicaid, nor did I know that she was now deputy assistant to President Bush for policy development with a specialty in health policy and welfare reform. Like Bush, I suppose, I had assumed that someone had to do this but it didn't much matter who. At any rate, she responded in a remarkable fashion to Bob Rae's quite valid and pedantic observation that infant mortality is significantly lower and life expectancy greater in Canada than in the United States:

> I look at what Canada has done and I feel very strongly this is not going to work for us. We are not them. We have a different cultural background. We have different views toward government.

After avoiding the statistical comparisons for a round or two more, Wilensky reiterated:

> I think that you know that both infant mortality and life expectancy are heavily influenced by life style factors.

Having made it clear that these were incidentals, like drug and alcohol addiction, she spun off into psychobabble:

> Well, I think that what we are trying to do in this country—and it's something this country has been a leader on—is look to outcome measurements, look to what really makes a difference, as well as, of course, how people function, how well they're functioning, the whole sense of well-being. *Very little of medical care at any point in time really is distinguishing between life and death.* It has a lot to do with quality of life, how well we function, the sense of well-being that we have in our system. [Emphasis added.]

(Memo to the pundits: Always remember that it's only Jerry Brown who is a cosmic flake. George Bush is, at the very most, out of touch.)

If life expectancy and infant mortality have nothing to do with the banal "distinguishing between life and death," and given that Wilensky spared us fetal mortality on this occasion, then what about the dull, costly, workaday interlude between cradle and grave? Bob Rae made the observation that "in your country there's something like 40 million people estimated for '91 who don't have any insurance at all, another 50 million people who are substantially underinsured" and was met by this astonishing reply:

> Let me say first the 90 million is a number I think most of us would not accept. There are some 30 million people without health insurance coverage. What counts for "underinsured" is very much in the eye of the beholder.

You could not have it much plainer than that. Or could you? *La* Wilensky went on to point out the hidden socialist agenda in Rae's claim that health care was "not a commodity; it's a basic right." Aha, she said, Canada was a statist society: "I think there are very few people who would want government controlling 12 percent of our gross national product and everything that means in terms of responsiveness."

So that's why Americans can't have health care: the old conservative fallacy of the vestigial, libertarian "night-watchman state." By that definition of society, South Central Los Angeles is the "responsive" Athenian ideal. Let them get on with it. Let them, indeed, settle the vexing imponderables of life and death. Reserve 12 percent of the G.N.P. for cops and soldiers to move in when it "breaks down." Make that 25 percent if need be, since the taxpayer has no claim on the state that can possibly rival the "security" demands that the state can levy on the taxpayer. Avert your eyes from the howling wilderness that exists between these two concepts, and then define that wilderness as "society." Then see if you can scare people with the bogy of Canadian "socialism." It might work in a bad year. It certainly works the other way round. I met a lot of Canadians who were worried about creeping Americanization. I used to scoff at them for faintheartedness and a lack of the grand sense of adventure. Of course, I still do. If you love risk, and you love risk capital, you have no choice but to bet the lives of those you love on the honeyed promise of Gail Wilensky, who wouldn't discuss details of her personal health-care arrangements by the time this column went to press.

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READING AROUND.

ELIZABETH POCHODA

Star Gazing

Sooner or later the Gennifer Flowers story was bound to make someone take an honest look at the twisted affair the mainstream media conduct with the supermarket tabloids they enjoy disdaining. Writing in the **Washington Journalism Review**, Todd Gitlin and Tim Schreiner have done just that. But the best part of their package is the running sidebar with comments on tabloid journalism and *l'affaire* Flowers from various editors, columnists and reporters—including an incoherent rant from Richard Kaplan, editor of the **Star**; a prissy disingenuous comment from **The New York Times**'s Max Frankel (remember that the **Times** had earlier leaned on the precedent of NBC News, which had in turn pointed to the tabloid **Globe** to justify naming the alleged victim in the Palm Beach rape case); a rambunctious defense of the tabs from Geneva Overholser, editor of **The Des Moines Register**; and a telling observation from Emily Rooney of WCVB-TV in Boston. Rooney notes that although the dailies sneer at the tabs as America's Funniest Home Newspapers, she had just read a story about a woman whose child was taken away because she had asked if it was wrong to be sexually aroused during breast-feeding, which **The Boston Globe** had picked up from . . . the **Star**! The curious thing is that while the Flowers tapes should have given newspapers the opportunity to discuss whether such allegations have any relevance to a candidate's ability to hold public office, even given the benefit of hindsight none of the fifteen people interviewed for the sidebar took up the issue.

As for the mainbars, although Gitlin is too high-minded for my taste about the "sleaziness" of the **Star**, **Globe** and **Enquirer**, he does understand how these mistresses to the mainstream are used, discarded and reviled as it suits their betters. And he asks why, if even the most disdainful of papers reported Flowers's story, none of them picked up the more explosive items about Bush's mistress(es) that ran in the presumably more respectable **LA Weekly** and **Village Voice**. Schreiner is better at the contradictions, pointing out that despite disclaimers like Frankel's, the **Times** has felt free to print unsubstantiated front-page speculation "that Mr. Yeltsin might be seriously ill from . . . alcohol abuse." Extremes meet.

Perotinitis

Far too much Bill and Hillary, but not nearly enough on cuddly strongman Ross Perot, who seems to be something of a press favorite. As Media Person Lewis Grossberger noted in his **Mediaweek** column (May 4), "How come no one made a big deal of it when Perot announced he was resigning from two clubs that ban minorities? How come nobody said, 'Hey, why was he in those bigoted clubs all this time?' " The only substantial piece I've run across, apart from Molly Ivins's in **Time** last week, is one by Peter Elkind in the current **Washington Monthly**, which reminds us that despite considerable successes with the Texas educational system, Perot hasn't a lot of patience with the sluggishness of participatory democracy. Bothered by drugs? He proposed cordoning off a troubled Dallas neighborhood so that police could make house-to-house searches and seize drugs and weapons. Hostages? When he sent commandos to rescue two of his employees from a Teheran prison, they sprang 11,000 other inmates as well, including murderers and rapists. A populist of the right-wing variety? See Molly Ivins again, in "Read My Lipstick," a column in the current **Mother Jones**, for a lesson on that ("Trying to save populism from the fangless inanity to which the American political press keeps trying to consign it is damn near full-time work these days") and, by the way, a reminder that despite press efforts to confine her to the category of cute-and-colorful character, she has a subtle and consistent political analysis to go with her wicked tongue. Also recommended in **MoJo** is Ben Bagdikian's "Journalism of Joy," an update through the Reagan years of his *Media Monopoly* thesis about corporate control of the press. Worth it for items like this one: "When the market crashed in 1987, the head of GE told NBC News to avoid language that might harm its owner's stock." How's that for Bringing Good Things to Life?

We Are the Word

On *Saturday Night Live* the Richmeister can be seen absorbed in the *Noam Chomsky Reader*, while elsewhere in the media there are other signs that the M.I.T. professor may be gaining on his detractors, at least as far as his work in linguistics is concerned. In the elegant publication **The Sciences** (May/June), for instance, an article titled "Talking Genes" by Karen Fitzgerald describes research done on a British family with a language disorder—its members were unable to form past tenses of regular verbs—which, simply put, suggests that grammar and syntax are genetically coded and arise, just as Chomsky has said they do, from specific biological features of the brain. More compelling testimony to the accuracy of Chomsky's theory may be found in "A Silent Childhood," a stunning two-part piece in **The New Yorker** (April 13 and 20) by Russ Rymer. The story of silent Genie (a pseudonym), who emerged in 1970 at the age of 12 after having been locked in a room from age 2, it describes the efforts of several sorts of scientists to study the child's acquisition of language, and thus the connection between language and humanity. In the end, although she possessed a considerable vocabulary, Genie never really developed grammar, having passed the time when the mind seems primed for it. Rymer's conclusion? "If Genie was any indication, we are physically formed by the influence of language. An essential part of our personal physical development is conferred on us by others, and comes in at the ear. The organization of our brain is as genetically ordained and as automatic as breathing, but, like breathing, it is initiated by the slap of a midwife, and the midwife is grammar."

But there is more to the Genie story than that, and Rymer's account of the territorial wars over the child and what finally became of her is as absorbing as, although a lot more tragic than, the parts on her struggles with language. About that, too, Chomsky seems to have been right. When asked to participate in the study, he wisely declined.

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BOOKS & THE ARTS.

Whipsawed in Washington

BARBARA KINGSOLVER

THE LIVING. *By Annie Dillard. HarperCollins. 397 pp. $22.50.*

Annie Dillard's new novel might aptly be called *The Dead* if sheer numbers count for anything, for in this moving account of the settlement of the Pacific Northwest in the late nineteenth century, characters die by the score. Children fall under wagon wheels and burn in house fires; hard-working adults drown under logjams and fishing boats, they are impaled by fallen trees, they perish beneath the perfect difficulty of their lives. The unfortunates are not only the novel's peripheral characters but also its central ones. As in life, no one is immune. The story is divided into seven separate books, most of which introduce a whole new set of principals—of necessity, usually.

Early in Book III, a small, curly-headed boy named Hugh Honer stands at the funeral of his father, whom he has recently watched drown, and when the minister calls out "O death, where is thy sting?" young Hugh thinks, perceptively, "Just about everywhere, since you ask."

Two months later Hugh sees his brother and sister buried and realizes that now his mother will have to distinguish, the way other women do when asked how many children they have: "Three children, one living." He has reached a new understanding of life's terms:

> Hugh himself, like all the region's children, reckoned on the kinds of thrift that life's tight conditions imposed, its high interest payments. Accidents happened, and human bodies were thin-skinned parcels out of which the force of life leaked at a prick. . . . Death was ready to take people, of any size, always, and so was the broad earth ready to receive them. A child's death was a heartbreak—but it was no outrage, no freak, nothing not in the contract, and not really early, just soon.

Dillard paints with a dark, splendidly ironic brush a picture of just how much things have changed in a mere century. In the 1990s an accidental death gives rise not only to handwringing and the shaking of fists at heaven but also, often, to lawsuits and questions of liability. As a culture we have almost ceased altogether to believe that death is "in the contract."

Barbara Kingsolver is author of the novels Animal Dreams *and* The Bean Trees *(HarperCollins) and, most recently,* Another America *(Seal Press), a collection of poetry.*

The Living is a celebration of the pure, naïve energy of capitalism and an indictment of its shortsightedness.

The only things that fall in the pages of this novel with more frequency than people are the giant Douglas firs, and this provides further irony. The hearty pioneers who crossed the open plains to plant their carefully hoarded seeds on the banks of Puget Sound discovered more trees there than anyone alive had ever bargained for. Trees became their adversaries by day and filled their dreams by night. Men literally spent their lives sawing through house-sized trunks and burning the slash, opening holes in the forest, hoping the sun might funnel down and touch their crops. The firs grew up so densely that women had to press down their skirts and move sideways between the trunks. When they could no longer bear their craving for the sight of open sky, families climbed into boats and fled to the middle of the sound.

For a generation that is just now learning to mourn the death of the old-growth forests, this story—whose action is fundamentally Man against Tree—makes a poignant read. The homesteaders curse the trees standing and deplore them prone, for the wood must be carted off or burned. "It was purely worthless, all this tonnage of tree—the farmer's cross. There was four houses' worth of knot-free lumber in each tree, but buying milled lumber was cheaper—if you had more money than time—than getting the trunks to the mill."

The Living is a celebration of the pure, naïve energy of capitalism and an indictment of its shortsightedness. The celebration is embodied in the hopeful, uncomplaining pioneers who take what life brings, whether it is a broken leg or a fortune; the indictment is shrewdly delivered in a conversation between railroad magnate James J. Hill and timber magnate Frederick Weyerhaeuser, who meet one evening in the study of Hill's stone mansion in Minnesota. (With exquisitely understated humor, Dillard makes Weyerhaeuser out to be a man who admired the mansion but "was not sure he approved of stone" as a building material.) Hill proposes to sell Weyerhaeuser the 900,000 acres of trees on his railroad corridor, and sell them for a song, because he needs them out of the way, and he offers to ship the lumber back East for even less than a song, for otherwise the cars will merely dump off their rowdy loads of immigrants and come home empty. Both men know a windfall when they see it:

> Jim Hill remained by the fire, calculating with a pen. Since a timbered acre in Washington yielded 40,000 feet of lumber, then it compared right favorably with an acre of Dakota wheat. In fact, one timbered Washington acre would produce freight wealth for his railroad equal to 367 years' freight wealth from an acre of wheat. He looked at the figure with satisfaction. It crossed his mind that one could harvest such heavy timber but once, while the acre of wheat produced forever. He had learned at his mother's knee, however, that this is an imperfect world.

The novel's strength lies in such dark insights, and in the formidably creative use of language that is Annie Dillard's dependable gift. Few other authors could risk—and win—a modern reader's attention through a full-page description of, for example, two men attempting to saw through a giant fir. Dillard's prose is simultaneously crowded and vibrant: She deals out details of the natural world (the men stand on a ten-foot platform to avoid having to saw through many extra feet of gummy, pitch-laden bark that swells near the ground); she flatters us with a vocabulary so patently unabridged that I, for one, read her books in the company of a good dictionary (one of the two men realizes his ignorance and it "gives him the fantods"); her descriptions tend to arrest the mind's eye in its tracks (as the men drew the crosscut saw between them, "muscles moved all over their two backs like salmon in creeks").

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A reader could hardly ask for more.

This is a book you *can* put down—and must, at times, to absorb its density. While it is a novel, Dillard's first, it doesn't differ noticeably in style from her nonfiction. Of her previous books it most closely resembles *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*, whose every paragraph yields stunning revelations but whose whole does not move forward along any single path. Likewise, *The Living* does not seem to pull itself from beginning to end through an identifiable tunnel of plot, unless it is to answer the question: "Who will still be alive at the end?" And this may be enough, for the characters are so lively and hopeful it's hard to avoid growing fond of them and wondering who, indeed, will be left standing among all those fallen trees. The central character might be said to be the town of Whatcom itself, on Bellingham Bay, which begins as a fir-dark settlement of a few families and grows to a booming town of plank streets and real estate offices and women who have shifted from slogging laundry in cedar troughs to more genteel concerns, such as how to keep the steel stays in their corsets from rusting. In the novel's forty-year span, beginning with the arrival of Rooney and Ada Fishburn in 1855 and ending with the great stock market crash of '93, which takes the fortunes of their son, we watch the town rise and fall so many times over, you would think it might learn its lesson. The point may be that a profit-driven economy is incapable of learning lessons, as it has no mind, only an appetite. Land prices in Whatcom soar each time gold is struck farther north or the town convinces itself it will be selected as the terminus for an approaching railway line. Each time the rumors prove false, yesterday's pricey real estate returns to its former status as swampland and mudflats, fit for clams. Those who fish the sound or farm the land persist, barely, but even they are whipped when prices fall for remote reasons. Every change of fortune anywhere else eventually hits here: "The nation's whip cracked, and Bellingham Bay snapped; the precarious Pacific Northwest territories exaggerated each economic boom or bust."

Dillard has chosen, then, a fine time and place in which to set an American history. And wisely, she tells the story as an accumulation of individual responses to the cracking whip, responses as fascinating as they are individual. John Ireland Sharp, a melancholy man who lost his entire family in childhood and, through his wits and orphaned status, earned a college education in the East, becomes a believer in the possibility of a kinder social order. When he returns to Whatcom he contributes two months' teacher's salary to the cause of Mary Kenworthy, an articulate socialist who calls the rich "our dog-salmon aristocracy." A season later, however, Kenworthy has joined the labor newspaper and nearly everyone else in cheering on a ghastly expulsion of Chinese immigrants. The so-called Celestials risked their lives as explosives experts to build the railroads but, having reached the end of the line, were judged to be "scurvy opium fiends" and, incidentally, competitors for manual-labor jobs. The day John Ireland Sharp watched a lynch mob of his peers herding Chinese men onto the ferry, he lost faith in human potential for higher vision. Ultimately, he abandons his socialite wife and returns to the island of his childhood, to live as a hermit.

No one else in this novel takes life quite so hard, and in the main they prove expert at taking it in whatever form it arrives. Clare Fishburn, a son of the bay's first immigrants, has lived through the

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Boris Vian
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Foreword by Louis Malle

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whole show without paying much attention; when the town bully promises to kill him just for sport, then, it's the gift of a lifetime. Clare begins to appreciate his wife and child and each day's new sunrise with such excellent vigor, even the crash of '93 fails to daunt him. He is John Ireland Sharp's opposite: unreflective, grateful and fully alive. His wife's sister, Minta Honer, who loses her soulmate husband and all her children except the astute young Hugh, takes still another tack: She knows her heart is doomed to sleepwalk through the rest of its days, but with her hands and her inherited wealth she offers her world an unfathomable generosity. After the crash, when destitute immigrants of every description show up on her farm begging to pick her unsalable hops, she hires them until every hop berry has "its own personal picker."

The neighboring Lummi and Nooksack tribes have lived in this forest for centuries without ever feeling compelled to cut it down, but now they cheerfully assist the settlers (whom they call The Bostons) in this enterprise, in exchange for protection from the ransacking tribes to the north. The Nooksacks are quietly appalled by the smell of the pale, unwashed Bostons and by the confusing way the men both pamper and hit the women, but they help them out in neighborly ways. The settlers, for their own part, are mortified by the frank, half-naked Indians, and condescend to them until "the woods were fairly flying with arrows of pity from all directions." By the time it is clear that the settlers have brought smallpox and a ferocious habit of stealing land, the native tribes find it is too late to revise their own habits of cooperation.

All these men and women seem to be marking out the boundaries of what is humanly possible, given that—contrary to current convictions—"the contract" does not promise a long and perfect survival. *The Living* addresses the sheer, breathless impermanence of life, of fortunes, of trees. Today's shortages have pulled themselves from the hat of yesterday's plenty, and all those who happened to be watching, Dillard reminds us, were probably applauding cheerfully. Only the rarest of characters have genuine insight into the future or the past, and those seem crippled with grief for what they see.

Toward the end of the novel, in the first year of the Panic, the women decide to hold a tree-planting ceremony in the schoolyard "to beautify their world." They plant maples, a linden, and "someone's supreme inspiration—a Douglas fir. . . . The men, for their part, who had exhausted their youths and manhoods, crippled their backs, and sacrificed flesh, digits, and limbs at the task of clearing trees, marveled at the women's zeal at planting trees, and reflected, not perhaps for the first time, that their partners and helpmeets seemed never fully to grasp the nature of their joint venture." And yet this symbolic gesture seems to have a perfect grasp of the venture, with its turning tides. The bold little collection of townswomen, their backbones as steely as their corsets, stand facing their children, eager to forget the wounded flesh of the recent past and anticipate the needs of a treeless, dawning century. If we cannot learn, at least we can make way for whatever comes next. □

The Fixer

FRED INGLIS

THE CHAIRMAN: John J. McCloy: The Making of the American Establishment. *By Kai Bird. Simon and Schuster. 800 pp. $30.*

On either side of the North Atlantic, even in the depths of the worst recession to hit publishing since the coming of the book, the shelves of biographies in the posh bookstores spread deep into the empire of the fiction department. No doubt, our taste for tales of the great partakes of the dazed silliness with which we in the biography-reading public have absorbed the pervasive force of the star system. The stars look down and the books about them tell us how to revere the spectacle from below and savor the smell of prurience that so sharpens our pleasure.

But there is something else, I believe, in all this making and taking of biographies that, at the beginning of our mysterious new epoch, is altogether more rational, more intellectually scrupulous, more *historical* than mere stargazing. After the repellent triumphalism of the cold war victory has lapsed and an even chillier wind blows us into the winter of recession, after the grand theories of Marxism, monetarism and sado-deconstruction have all utterly imploded, the form and content of biographies remain with which to grasp and understand the million-petaled variety of things. The local history of a man or woman yields the only reliable local knowledge. If the historian is careful enough with what the figure in question was really up to, and what that same figure believed him- or herself to be doing, and does not tell the tale of what the devout propagandist of a later moment may anachronistically prefer its hero to be doing, then biography can win some small, hard truths from the past. It is, after all, the most popular form of everyday theory.

So Kai Bird has chosen one hell of a subject in taking John J. McCloy as his biographical *figura*. McCloy is the only member of the *vieillesse dorée* who dominated the first three decades of cold war policy—George Kennan, Dean Acheson, Averell Harriman and company—not to have received full biographical obsequies. He was at the nub of power from 1940 until the Iranian hostage crisis: comptroller of the shameful internment of the Japanese-Americans; Henry Stimson's aide before Hiroshima; First Commissioner of Federal Germany as it became bulwark of NATO defenses and, therefore, site engineer of its amazing economic success; chairman of the World Bank; Kennedy's first officer in charge of disarmament talks and rearmament policy; member of the fateful Excomm when Kennedy gambled my life and yours against a petty trick or two in Congress. Later still, into his 70s and 80s, McCloy was padding about the White House as Johnson turned the sound up or down on "Rolling Thunder," and was busybodying about the coffee tables of power when the OPEC countries quadrupled the price of oil and changed the world forever. God bless us all, he was pretty much founder of the C.I.A.

In between times, as is the way of the American establishment, McCloy remained on the letterhead of the grandest law firm of Manhattan, and by virtue of his clubs, his contacts, the absolute probity of his character and the utter mediocrity of his intelligence, brought his colleagues—and without ever making much of a thing about it, himself—heaps of power, prestige, property and of course dollars.

There was truly much to admire about the old boy, especially if you are writing from the venalities and arrogance of

Fred Inglis's most recent book is The Cruel Peace *(Basic).*

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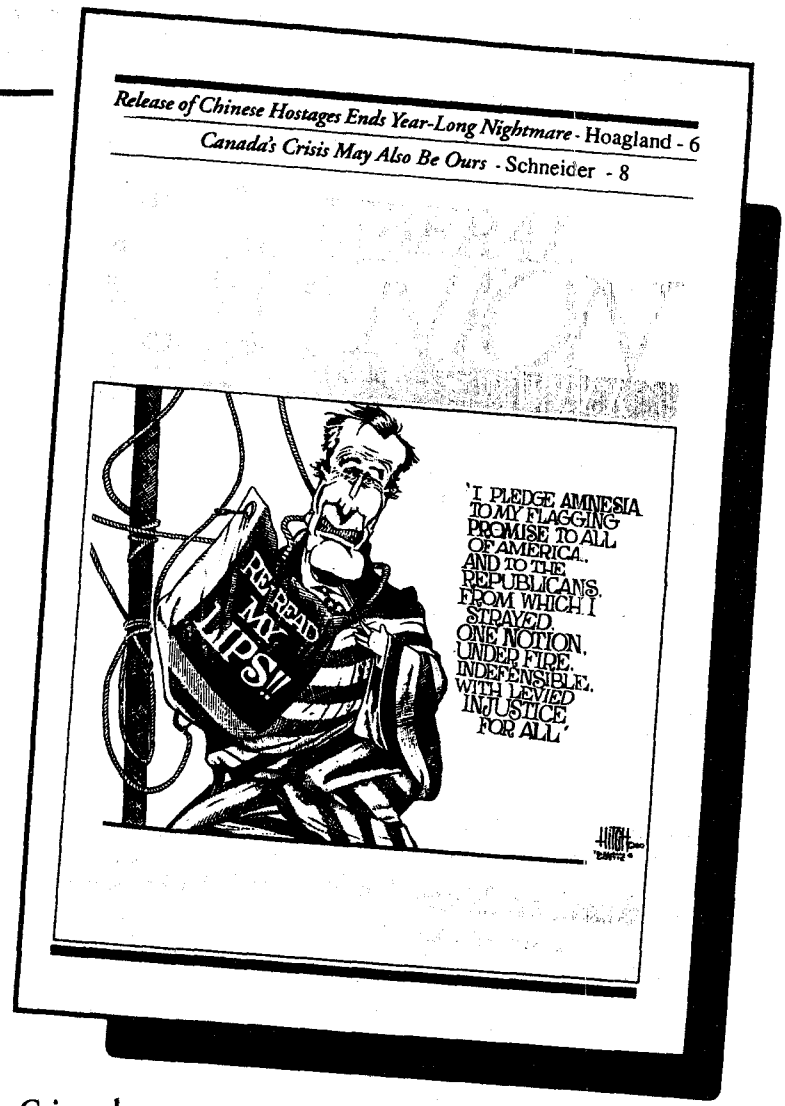
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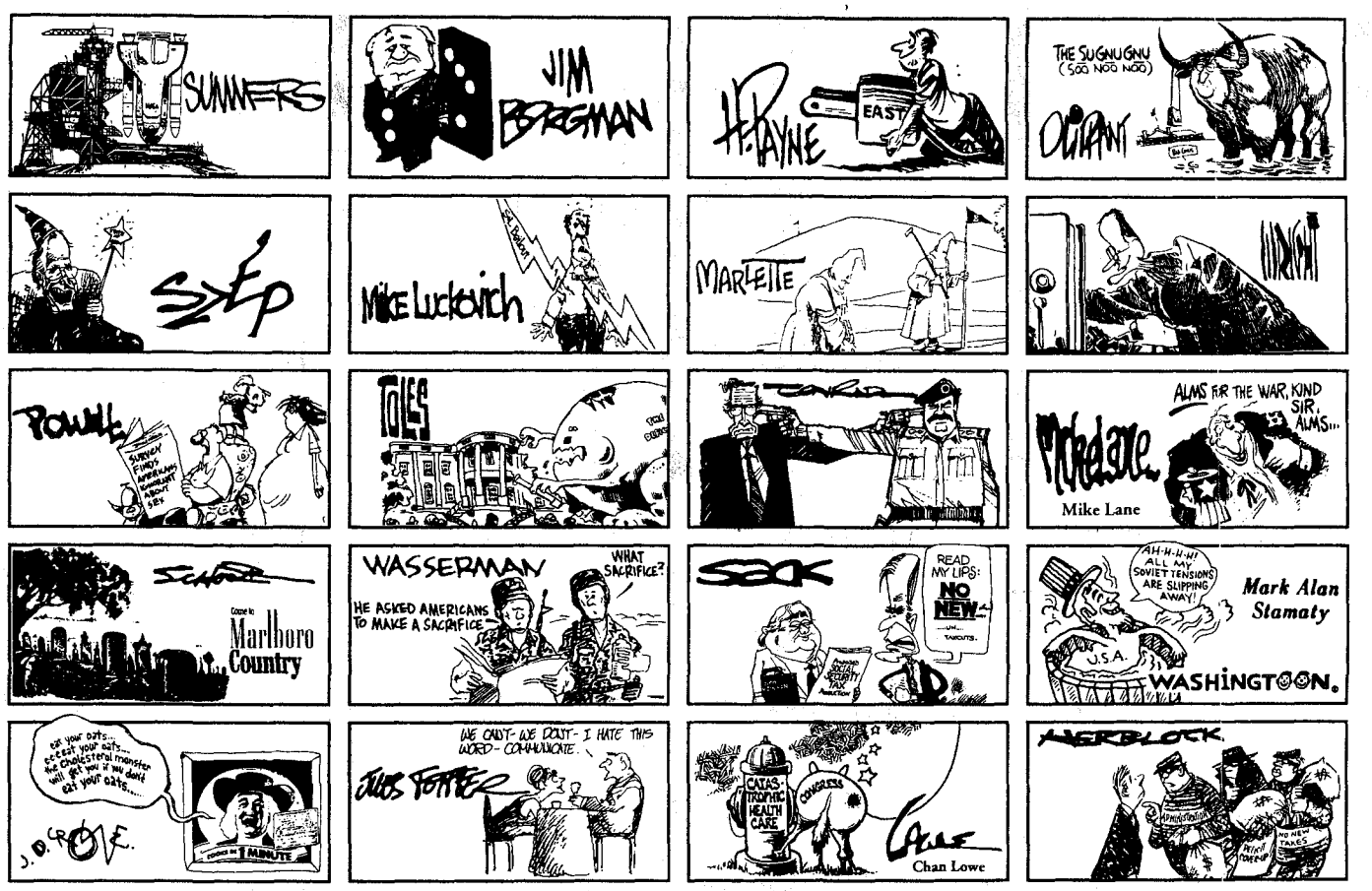

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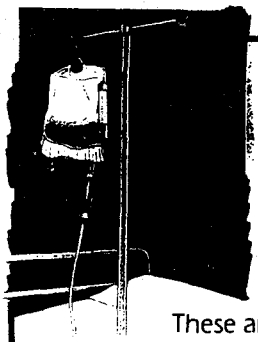

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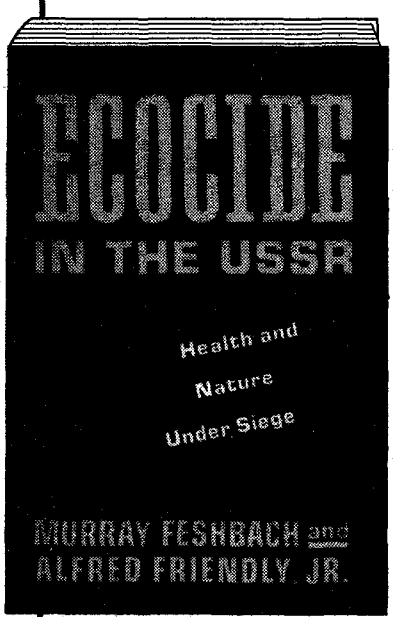

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power in bloody old England. McCloy made it to the top, driven from behind by the powerful ambitions of a widowed mother who paid for his prep school by hairdressing the rich in their Philadelphia sitting rooms. By way of Amherst, Harvard and the Officer Training Corps, McCloy absorbed the values of what Kennan once described to me with a proper absence of irony as the American gentleman. As Kennan pointed out in the same conversation, the class of patrician Bostonians he rightly looked up to didn't have to depend on patronage or a career hierarchy for their position. If they quarreled with the President on a matter of principle—and principle was still a strong word in their politics—they could walk away and go straight back to their law firms.

McCloy formed himself in this pattern before the end of World War I. By that date, the United States had brought to perfection the culture and mechanisms necessary to produce a finished ruling class. It doesn't take long, whatever Henry James thought. Episcopalianism; Groton, Exeter; Princeton, Harvard; a spell in uniform; and the thing is done. The product of such a formation was a gentleman, certainly, with the slightly stiff and attractively modest incorruptibility the term implies. With admirable directness, Kai Bird writes of finding McCloy admirable, as both type and token of that plain-speaking, law-abiding, freeholding Scottish-Americanness.

The intellectual origins of the American Revolution were hardly more than a century older than McCloy himself. At his best, as with Kennan or Acheson, or Stimson and Lippmann, those origins spoke through McCloy's voice. But in all his daunting fidelity to the details of McCloy's almost centurylong life, his earnest attention to the quotidian facts, Bird fails to grasp the grand theme implicit in his subtitle and tell us how the American establishment of the epoch really did make and remake itself over that period. He twice quotes C. Wright Mills, but in a manner strange for a contributing editor of America's great dissident journal, Bird never brings out how McCloy's elite composed, held and renewed its power, until at last that power was spent up by the profligacy of the elderly and *arriviste* elites of Florida and California, who mortally wounded their mighty nation in the process.

The most important experience of McCloy's life was his extended inquiry into the Black Tom affair, in which a marshaling yard filled with wagonloads

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of high explosives waiting for shipment to France in 1916 exploded, smashing windows a mile up Manhattan. Long after the trail was cold, McCloy was hired to investigate the case for insurance claimants. For almost a decade he patiently sifted ancient records and distant contacts until, on the brink of the new war, he uncovered pretty near certain evidence of German espionage involvement and accumulated his rich storehouse of undercover experience and diplomatic exchange. He prized information out of the Nazis; he dealt in the protocols of dead drops, invisible ink and the earliest tricks of surveillance and phone-tapping, all now rendered canonical by John le Carré.

In Sartre's biography of Flaubert, a work of half-crazy genius, the author fixes a single experience—a bad fall—as the crux of the novelist's formation. Black Tom, a ten-year formation, was McCloy's undramatic crux. From it flowed his dismal conduct toward the Japanese-Americans, his dull and inexcusable incredulity toward firm reports of the Holocaust coming through from 1942 onward, his pussyfooting around Hiroshima, his solid reliability as a cold warrior.

Bird's worthy biography fully documents McCloy's record as an utterly consistent and *bien-pensant* stooge of American power. At this distance, it seems no accident that McCloy's name hardly appears in the indexes of the cold war classics: a handful of references in Acheson, fewer in Kennan, none at all in Richard Rhodes's *Making of the Atomic Bomb*. Yet McCloy was utterly in and of the power elite. Bird tells the tale of this stolid man—well, stolidly. He leaves the plain facts of McCloy's unimaginativeness, his lawyer's respectability, his ineffectual caution to speak for themselves. But, alas, they are inaudible. The probity and good nature, the cracker-barrel Americanness and the geniality went along with a familiar obedience to an unexamined *doxa* grounded in all the old hoo-ha about global interests, spheres of influence, missile gaps and free-market economies.

Seen through these different lenses McCloy was at one with the racist old bully Stimson, who put the Marines in Nicaragua to chase Sandino in 1928, and the prince of darkness himself, Henry Kissinger. Certainly McCloy had little of Kennan's agonized self-and-nation-doubting, still less of Kennan's astonishing capacity to demolish his own ideas from inside and build a quite new structure from the ground up.

"Israel's very life depends on making peace with the Palestinians, and thus opening the door to the Arab world as a whole." (p. 81)

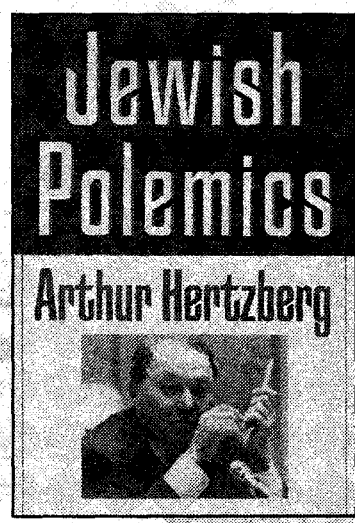
THE CONTROVERSY

"I have never found a way to absolve God of the crime of Auschwitz." (p. 243)

THAT IS

"It is clear to me that I think these thoughts because I was brought up in a rabbi's house." (p. xi)

ARTHUR HERTZBERG



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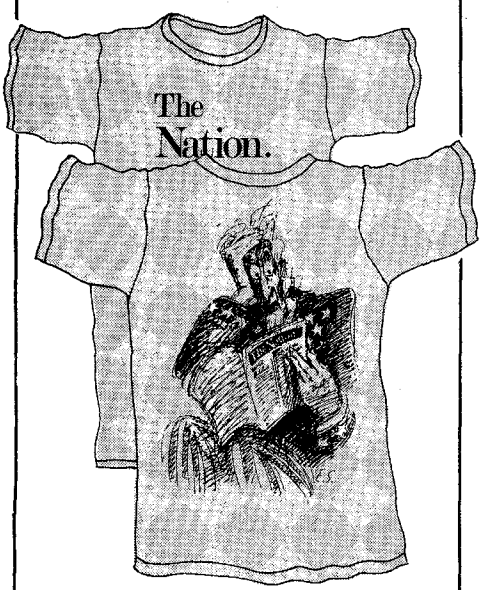

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In the end, McCloy's principled refusal to strut the stage on which Kissinger and Haig paraded their narcissism, his Robert Frostish demeanor and Quincy Adams values, his lovable domesticity and his commie-hating goodness all matter less than one would have hoped. His contributions to the making of American foreign policy were at once ruthless and conformist. The wisdom for which as one of the magi he was praised by Presidents and *Time* hardly went further than a fortune cookie. He was dazzled by real intelligence, even when—particularly when—it was Khrushchev's, but couldn't match it with either the judgment of jurisprudence or the good sense of an honest businessman.

He was a much lesser man than, say, George Marshall, though doubtless a better one than George Bush. The massive eventuality of the world came to him pretty much as one damn thing after another. What Kai Bird might have said—but understandably endeared to his subject after ten years' research, he leaves us to infer—is that, as befits a member of the power elite, events never got John McCloy down. He rode them from on top, and for so long and so luckily that people thought he knew what he was doing. □

Wise Men, Foolish Choices

CAROLYN EISENBERG

A PREPONDERANCE OF POWER: National Security, the Truman Administration, and the Cold War. *By Melvyn P. Leffler. Stanford. 689 pp. $29.95.*

America's victory in the cold war is bound to transform the historical scholarship on its origins. However, since it takes more lead time to produce a properly footnoted study than to build a missile, the full impact may be years away. The immediate effect has been to revitalize a question specialists have been debating for two decades: Was that first generation of American cold warriors—the gang of Harriman, Acheson, Kennan, Lovett et al.—made up of "wise men" or fools?

Melvyn Leffler's brilliant new book on Truman's foreign policy is an invaluable contribution to that inquiry. This massive work was begun during the height of the cold war and was completed at the birth of the New World Order. In the intervening period, the author appears to have read every national security document that was generated by the White House and the State and War departments, down through approximately the third echelon of the bureaucracies.

Most writers who have done original research on the early cold war start flagging by 1949. But Leffler is indefatigable as he carries his story through the extravagances of NSC 68, the miseries of Korea and the global mobilization, which was the ultimate bequest of the Truman presidency. He analyzes U.S. policy in Europe, the Far East and across the Third World, focusing on the relationship between military, political and socioeconomic goals. For sheer comprehensiveness and thorough investigation, this volume is unmatched. It is also miraculously literate, thought-provoking and quite surprising in its line of argument.

As implied in the title, *A Preponderance of Power*, Leffler views the cold war as a lopsided competition. Eschewing the language of "containment" and "deterrence," he shows how, during eight formative years, the United States gradually took charge of the postwar world. In a remarkable sequence, the Americans promoted the reconstruction and reorganization of Western Europe, precipitated the division of Germany, militarized the Continent, created and then accelerated a nuclear arms race, and moved into the Third World, where they inflicted incompetent and frequently repressive regimes upon reluctant people.

By contrast, the Soviet initiatives were more limited in scope. Since the records are still unavailable, Leffler is cautiously agnostic about Russian intentions. However, he demonstrates that even in Eastern Europe, where their aggression was most flagrant, the Russians did not establish full-fledged police states until after the Marshall Plan was in place. Outside Eastern Europe, they exercised indirect influence through the control of foreign Communist parties. Yet they frequently used that authority to brake rather than incite indigenous radicalism. Leffler shows how militarily inferior the Russians were, despite the much-touted menace of the Red

Carolyn Eisenberg, an associate professor of American history at Hofstra University, is writing Drawing the Line: The American Decision to Divide Germany, 1944-49, *for Cambridge University Press.*

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Army, and how slow they were to address that imbalance. And he describes several important occasions, particularly in regard to German matters, when the Soviet Union sought negotiations only to be rebuffed by the United States.

These disproportions draw Leffler into the Rationality Problem: If the Russian role was so restricted, why were American interventions so extensive? This question is especially compelling, since he obviously believes that tough U.S. policies induced worse Soviet behavior. He argues, for example, that the Berlin blockade was a direct response to the American decision to accelerate Germany's industrial recovery and to create a West German state. More broadly, he suggests that the militancy of the Cominform and the complete crackdown in Eastern Europe were a reaction to the Marshall Plan and Soviet exclusion from West European affairs.

This self-defeating dynamic has led many specialists to conclude that U.S. officials were "unwise men" who allowed ideological predilections to cloud practical judgments about American self-interest. Within the academic world, this assessment has increasingly dominated the study of U.S. foreign policy; there is now a veritable cottage industry of "irrationality monographs." The standard argument is that in one arena or another, American leaders have exaggerated dangers and made unnecessary and costly commitments.

Leffler is not that dismissive. Before deciding that U.S. policy-makers are fools, he wants to know how they think. So he has plunged into an unprecedented mass of documents to unearth their reasoning. He finds them preoccupied with a central mission—how to keep a potential adversary from controlling the resources, skilled labor, industrial infrastructure and military bases of Eurasia. From the harsh experience of the twentieth century, American leaders had concluded that when a hostile power or combination of powers achieved such ascendancy, U.S. national security was profoundly endangered.

By 1945, only the U.S.S.R. had the capability to play this role, but the Americans were uncertain about its aims. Although the evidence remained ambiguous, Leffler describes how U.S. officials began to place the most unfavorable construction on Russian actions. In the first briefs for containment, they indulged in "double standards and self-deception" and managed to twist every Russian national demand into a scheme for revolution or conquest.

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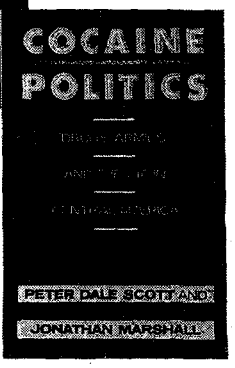

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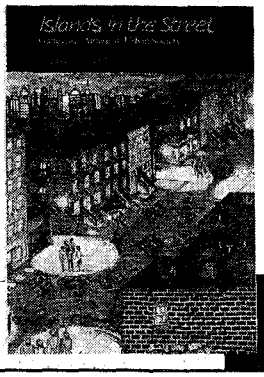

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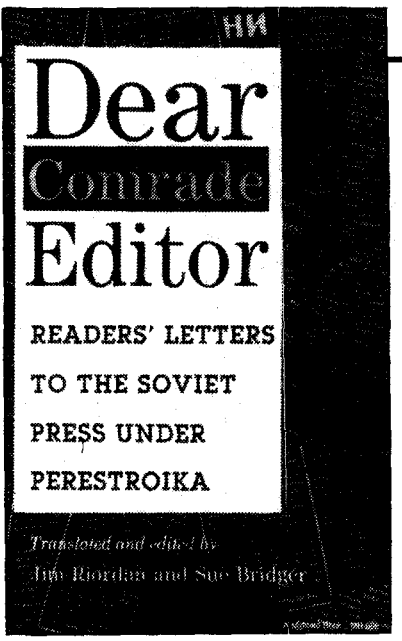

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However, Leffler's more important and interesting point is that U.S. policy-makers were not focused on Russian purposes. The critical factor for them was the social turmoil and economic stagnation on the Eurasian continent. These conditions abetted the growth of diverse left-wing movements, which everywhere included powerful Communist parties. The Americans feared that the Russians would "capitalize on developments they did not cause but that could redound to their long-term advantage." From this standpoint, it made no difference whether Moscow was encouraging the left to seize power. Nor did it matter if the left enjoyed popular support and won elections. Once in office, radicals "would pursue policies that directly or indirectly served the purposes of the Soviet government."

Determined to maintain "a preponderance of power," the Americans take initiatives in western Germany, Western Europe and Japan that they know will provoke the Russians. Leffler claims this is a self-conscious gamble designed to offset the far greater dangers of internal disintegration. When the Russians respond with new threats and insults, the Americans do not reconsider their choices. Instead, they feel more confirmed in the original prescriptions. However, in early 1948 they turn to *military* supremacy as a means of undergirding their political and economic ascendancy. In the embittered international atmosphere, there is an increased prospect of war by miscalculation. In addition, Western European friends are nervous about both Russian and German strength, and seek the assurance of an American military presence. Thus a "risk-taking" diplomacy is the godmother to NATO.

By the end of the decade, U.S. policy-makers are increasingly disturbed by events in the Third World. They perceive the markets and raw materials in these "peripheral" areas as crucial to the recovery of Eurasia's industrial "core." Although Leffler employs the vocabulary of world systems theory to describe these American concerns, he views economic integration as primarily a means of forestalling Soviet expansion and not necessarily an end in itself.

The main obstacle to this linkage of core and periphery is revolutionary nationalism, which is sometimes Communist (Indochina) and sometimes not (Egypt). The author shows that in the Third World, as in the European theater, the issue for the Americans is not the U.S.S.R.'s responsibility for upheaval but its ability to benefit from it. In the aftermath of the Chinese Revolution the Americans opt for a conservative crusade to prevent additional defections. Two years later, when they are stalled along Korea's 38th Parallel by Maoist troops and the implicit threat of Russian engagement, they resolve never to be so frustrated again. The antidote: more and bigger nuclear weapons. Leffler demolishes the notion of "deterrence" by showing how a vast nuclear arsenal was the means of guaranteeing America's political and economic global ascendancy.

At the end of this disturbing narrative, it is curious to find that Leffler's overall assessment of U.S. policy-makers is mixed, if not moderately favorable. Leffler concludes by asking directly whether American leaders were "wise men," "prudent men" or "foolish men," and finds that they were a little of each: "Faced with the reality of Soviet domination in Eastern Europe and the prospective growth of Soviet power throughout Eurasia, America's cold war policies . . . were partly

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wise, partly prudent and partly foolish. Given the imponderables policy-makers faced in the international system and the uncertainties about Soviet aims, it is their prudence that seems most striking."

By consolidating control in the West, the Americans contributed to repression in the East.

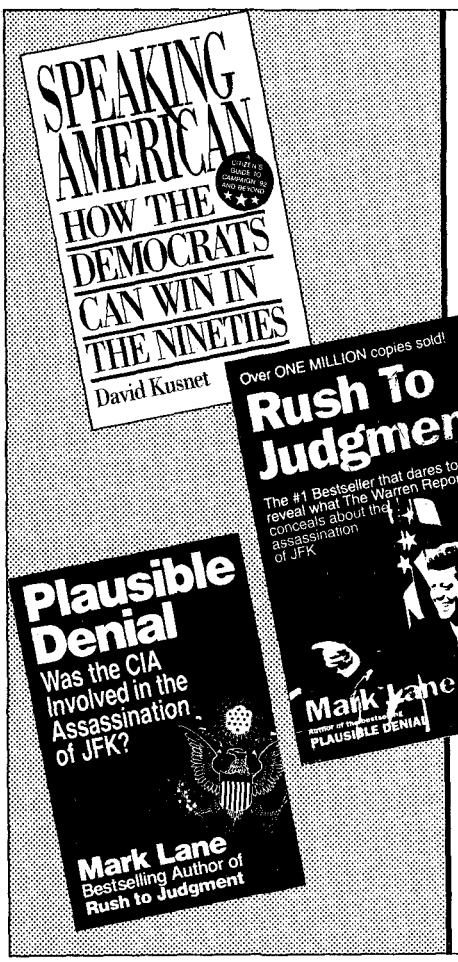
These men were "wise" in their programs of social and economic reconstruction for Europe and Japan, their decision to lift "harsh" occupation regimes and "to fill the vacuums of power" in the industrial heartlands. They were "foolish" in the Third World, where they minimized local sources of discontent, overrated the economic importance of the periphery to the core and relied too much on the conventional and nuclear military balance as a means of influencing internal political struggles.

But as for the main matter, Leffler sees as "prudent" the U.S. decision to cease accommodating the Russians and to partition Germany, create an exclusive Western European bloc and lock the U.S.S.R. out of the Japanese settlement. He maintains that "in 1946 and 1947 a tolerable configuration of power in Eurasia probably could not have been brought about without provoking the Soviets. The threats emanating from the postwar socioeconomic dislocation and power vacuums were too great to allow for a policy of reassurance." So the Americans were rational after all, and the real culprit was neither the Russians nor themselves but the disruptions created by World War II.

Leffler doesn't reach these conclusions until page 495, by which time he is writing against the backdrop of the New World Order. Perhaps his critical approach to the past is being tempered by contemporary changes. Although I think this is occurring, there are also features of his project that give it a conservative cast. Before considering the merits of the case, it may be useful to identify them.

The most significant is "the wise man problem" itself, which has formed a staple of so much academic inquiry. In essence, this is a question about the collective intelligence of the people making decisions. It focuses on the relationship between means and ends, and asks whether policymakers have sensibly coordinated them. This exploration bestows a certain built-in legitimacy to officials, since their goals are taken for granted. Within the scholarly community, critical discussion of goals is perceived as "moralizing." However, when policy objectives are not critically scrutinized, there is no way to fathom what they really are or to say whose interests are being served and whose damaged.

This pragmatic orientation nurtures a reliance on government documents, which reveal how U.S. officials thought about the world and the formal decisions they made. Such records must inevitably form the basis for understanding what American foreign policy was about. However, the documents can induce a certain myopia, for they tend (especially when there are cartloads of them) to imprison the reader in the conscious opinions of the powerful. Thus it becomes difficult to see the structure of their ideas, or to assess independently their self-perceptions or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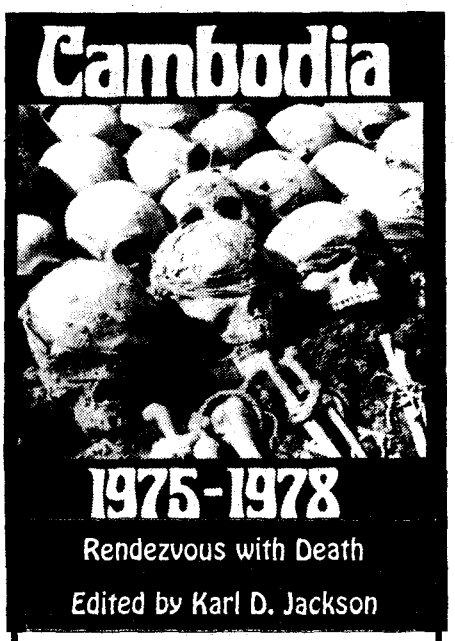

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the consequences of their actions. Leffler is at his best when he breaks free of these constraints. Yet at times the sheer weight of all those policy papers exacts an intellectual toll.

Suppose we reopen this subject of U.S. goals and try to move beyond the particular vision of American leaders. What other evidence is available? And what will it enable us to see? We can pay more attention to American actions in the world, as distinct from thoughts and decisions, and consider how they might illuminate purpose. We can also turn up the volume on the dissident voices of domestic and foreign contemporaries to provide a context for the priorities of policy-makers.

Using these approaches causes certain aspects of America's cold war program to become more salient. As Leffler points out, American leaders were preoccupied with the task of preventing the U.S.S.R.'s control of the Eurasian core. And they feared this would occur through a coalescence of indigenous left-wing movements and Soviet state power. Yet this danger was as much the consequence as the cause of U.S. behavior. What requires explanation is *why* radical groupings would accept Russian control, and *why* the security-minded Soviets should incite foreign insurgency.

These are not simple issues, but one significant factor was surely American insistence on a capitalist restoration. From the end of World War II, the Americans used their power in Western Europe and parts of Asia to preserve private ownership, restrict labor and eliminate barriers to the free movement of capital and goods. This was provoking not only to indigenous leftists but to the U.S.S.R., which, at least for Germany, desired far-reaching structural change. Leffler has shown us how, in the short term, rigid American policies created a military threat. What he does not adequately emphasize is the willingness of American leaders to subordinate the world's physical safety to the demands of building a certain kind of international economic order. When put this way, the whole enterprise seems far more controversial.

And it was. Not only did certain domestic critics, such as Henry Wallace and Walter Lippmann, challenge the bellicosity of America's postwar stand but so did many Western European and Asian friends. Ultimately, NATO was a response to Allied entreaties. But even those entreaties were a reaction to U.S. adventurism as well as to Russian aggression. Thus at the time of the Berlin crisis, many Western European nations preferred to negotiate with the Russians on German unification rather than abandon the city or risk a war. Since the Americans ruled out a compromise in Central Europe, the only alternative was Continental polarization and military preparedness.

Moreover, in gaining assent for their economic and political program the Americans were frequently coercive. Leffler stresses the cooperation of foreign leaders. Yet often these leaders owed their tenure in office to American assistance (France, Italy) if not outright intervention (Greece). As for the general population in the Eurasian core, there were competing ideas about the rights of private property, the role of labor, the activities of the state, the functions of a national budget and the regulation of international trade. American leaders used their economic and military "preponderance" to maximize conformity with their own policy preferences. From the standpoint of the local inhabitants, this sort of interference was quite different from blocking the Red Army.

By consolidating control in the West, the Americans indirectly contributed to the repression in the East. Although Russian behavior was already brutal, the Americans willfully widened the European split when there was still political pluralism in Hungary, Czechoslovakia and eastern Germany. American representatives in Eastern Europe warned of the harsh reprisals that would result from the creation of a Western bloc. In Frankfurt, the leaders of the U.S. military government—Lucius Clay and Robert Murphy—initially opposed the German partition partly because of the dangers to eastern German residents. Yet, tragically, such concerns had little resonance in official Washington.

These are some of the elements that must be encompassed in a final appraisal of the old cold warriors. Leffler has made an impressive case for their "prudence." Given certain policy objectives, these men were much smarter than we sometimes think in fashioning the instruments for their attainment. Yet as the author implies, wisdom is something quite different. It entails imagination, a broad appreciation of consequences and, in the realm of international affairs, an ability to accommodate the disparate requirements of foreign and domestic populations. Judged by that larger standard, the first generation of postwar policy-makers bequeathed a more dubious legacy. □

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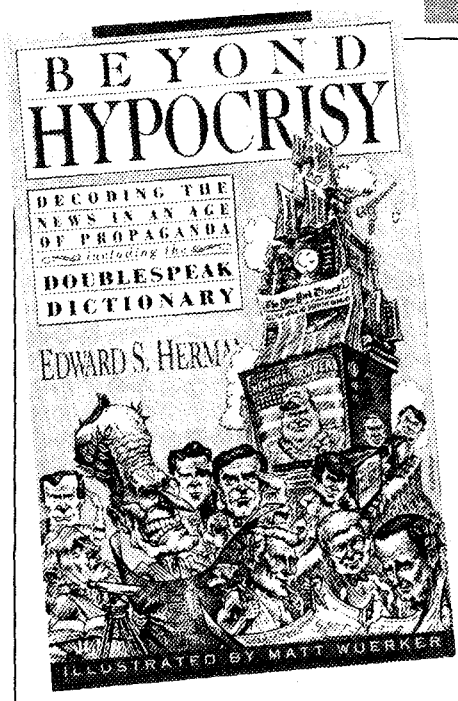

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Her Soul's High Song

JOHN LEONARD

JAZZ. By Toni Morrison. Knopf. 229 pp. $21.

From a newspaper clipping about a fugitive slave in Ohio who killed her own infant rather than see her returned to bondage in the South—"Now she would never know what a woman suffers as a slave . . . I will go singing to the gallows"—Toni Morrison made *Beloved*. From a photograph in James Van der Zee's *Harlem Book of the Dead* of the body of a young girl, shot at a party by a jealous boyfriend, who died refusing to identify her assailant ("I'll tell you tomorrow"), Toni Morrison has made *Jazz*. All you need is radiance and genius.

In Harlem, in 1926, a 50-year-old sample-case beauty products salesman falls in "deepdown spooky love" with a high school girl for whom "everything was like a picture show . . . and she was the one on the railroad track, or the one trapped in the sheik's tent when it caught on fire." She goes dancing without him, so he shoots her. And then his crazy wife, who irons hair, will crash the funeral and try with a knife to disfigure the dead girl's face. To find out why any of this happened, all of it on the first page of *Jazz*, you'll have to listen to the end of Morrison's song—as if Sidney Bechet had met the Archduke Trio; as if Ellington had gone Baroque.

You will get the City, designed for tall dreams, electric danger and getting away with it; for desire instead of love; for smelling good and "looking raunchy." You will get the music of colored men who float down from the sky blowing saxophones; rooftop clarinets and drums for the dead, and a flourish of fingered horns in the barrel hooch, juke joint and tonk house; the six-stringed blues guitar and a brass cut so fine "you would have thought everything had been forgiven." You'll hear about newspapers like *The Messenger* and *The Crisis*, unions like the Pullman Porters, political parties like the Readjustors, race riots like East St. Louis's; about polishing shoes, rolling tobacco and selling #2 Nut Brown door to door, along with a vanishing cream. You will have to swim back from this risky city, against the migratory tide, South again to Virginia, the sugarcane and hibiscus; the mules and possums and walnut trees; a butter press, a broken plow, a rainbow and a fox; a blade of blackbirds and a portent of redwings and a tree on a river called Treason whose roots grow backward, climbing toward leaves and wind and light; a cave where one mother is a wild thing, and a well where another mother drowns.

Jazz is a book of dispossession and of haunting. Novel by novel, Toni Morrison reimagines the lost history of her people, their love and work and nightmare passage and redemptive music. It's a brilliant project, a ghostly chorale, a constellation of humming spheres with its own gravity and now this brand-new star, which is even trickier than usual. If jazz is a music the performer composes himself, then this novel she calls *Jazz* is a book that composes itself: "I have watched your face for a long time now, and missed your eyes when you went away from me." It also *surprises* itself. But I'll get to that modernist wickedness in a minute.

Morrison's people are in a separate republic of dreams, inside the white whale.

> If anything I do, in the way of writing novels (or whatever I write), isn't about the village or the community or about you, then it is not about anything. I am not interested in indulging myself in some private, closed exercise of my imagination that fulfills only the obligation of my personal dreams—which is to say yes, the work must be political. . . . It seems to be that the best art is political and you ought to be able to make it unquestionably political and irrevocably beautiful at the same time.

Beautiful, certainly. I find that I want to roll around in Morrison's books, not a reviewer but an epicure, even a voluptuary. Give me, instead of overviews, her banquet of buttercakes and babies' ghosts, conjuring and "graveyard loves," Chicken Little and cooked flesh, a spittle-web of spiders and the breath of snakes, laws of hospitality and "men with the long-distance eyes"—after which, I want to fall into that Shadrack sleep "deeper than the hospital drugs; deeper than the pits of plums, steadier than the condor's wing; more tranquil than the curve of eggs." This, of course, isn't criticism; it's gourmandizing. But don't you already know as much as you want to about African oral traditions, Uncle Remus, sermons, slave songs and the blues?

Morrison has said that their music no longer belongs exclusively to her people, so novels are going to have to sing those origin myths and archetypes. I suppose that she is what happened to Zora Neale Hurston once she grew out of Franz Boas: *Mules and Men* for the space age; *Their Eyes Were Watching Some Other God*. She presumes Phillis Wheatley, Lucy Terry and Harriet E. Wilson; Jessie Fauset, Georgia Douglass Jackson and Alice Childress; Paule Marshall and Gwendolyn Brooks; plus Harriet Tubman, Sojourner Truth, Rosa Parks and Fannie Lou Hamer. She also presumes Richard Wright, James Baldwin, Ralph Ellison and their brilliant literature of grievance. She presumes, as well, the Bible and Shakespeare. She ate Faulkner for a snack.

In what way, though, is she political? She never bothers to explain to her readers the epidemiology and the ecosystems of racist oppression; they already know that stuff. But eavesdrop on this art—"You don't listen to people," Circe dissed Milkman; "your ear is on your head, but it's not connected to your brain"—and you hear about an Other America bearing no resemblance to such salacious confabulations as a "culture of poverty" and an affectless "underclass." She's not some Sojourner Dante, touring the limbos of welfare motherhood, circling a crackhead hell. Her people aren't *victims*, at least not pathologies; they have choices and resources, styles and survival skills, and their own business to get on with, inside the white whale that swallowed them. Except in *Tar Baby* and *Beloved*, Morrison's white folks are outside the main action of her characters. "We" are their bad weather and bad luck. Just as her sex and violence are mystified (become pity, howling, rainbows, waste), so the dominant culture is oddly, almost mischievously, abstracted—like probability theory (or maybe Neoplatonism). Such overt political action as occurs (a protest march in *Sula*, assassins in *Song of Solomon*, the mournful drums in *Jazz*) seems always peripheral to some other drama of baffled hopes, family wounds, confused paternity, broken connection or historical amnesia, in a separate republic of dreams. But inside this republic, what goes on is identity-making. And if we don't under-

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stand that identity is political, we don't understand anything at all.

How does it feel to a white reader to be bad luck, like chemicals in a lake? As if we're not, every minute of the day, so important? As if maybe there were complicated reasons for a Malcolm X, as there are for a Louis Farrakhan; and as if, for equally complicated reasons, Josephine Baker has more resonance than Madonna? When Sula makes fun of poor black Jude, the rest of us (that's everybody male and pale who's ever appeared in a suit, a tie and a Beltway blisterpack on Ted Koppel's *Nightline*) are merely incidental. "I mean," says Sula,

> I don't know what the fuss is about. I mean, everything in the world loves you. White men love you. They spend so much time worrying about your penis they forget their own. The only thing they want to do is cut off a nigger's privates. And if that ain't love and respect I don't know what is. And white women? They chase you all to every corner of the earth, feel for you under every bed. . . . Now ain't that love? They think rape soon's they see you, and if they don't get the rape they looking for, they scream it anyway just so the search won't be in vain. Colored women worry themselves into bad health just trying to hang on to your cuffs. Even little children—white and black, boys and girls—spend all their childhood eating their hearts out 'cause they think you don't love them. And if that ain't enough, you love yourselves. Nothing in this world loves a black man more than another black man. You hear of solitary white men, but niggers? Can't stay away from one another a whole day. So. It looks to me like you the envy of the world.

Worse, what could be more political than the fact that Morrison—with her wit, poetry and passion, breadth of sympathy, depth of feeling, range of interest, grasp of detail, powers of imaginative transformation, command of time, character, scruple, generosity and radiance, and magical mastery of the Mother Tongue—turns out to be the best writer working in America?

We should have known she was something special from virtually the first sentences of her first novel, *The Bluest Eye* (1970): "Quiet as it's kept, there were no marigolds in the fall of 1941. We thought, at the time, that it was because Pecola was having her father's baby that the marigolds did not grow." The surprise now, after the celebrity that sears and seals, is that back in 1970 she'd

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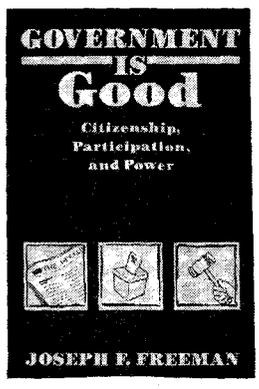

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wanted to call herself by her *given* name, Chloe Anthony Wofford, but failed to persuade her publisher in time. Considering how crucial names always are in her fiction—Breedlove, Peace and Soaphead Church; Ajax and Jade; Baby Suggs and Stamp Paid—this looks stranger as the years go by. Naming, after all, is one of the great orchestral themes of *Song of Solomon*: If not for a Pilate and a Guitar, Macon (Milkman) Dead would not have learned to fly.

But the becoming was there to begin with, in this End-of-Childhood novel: the community and the scapegoat; caste and class; rootedness and the supernatural; prose you can sing as well as read; dreams of flight and transfiguration. Pecola imagines that if only she had blue eyes, she'd be as lovable as Shirley Temple was to Bojangles. She ends up crazy, "beating the air, a winged but grounded bird. . . . picking and plucking her way between the tire rims and the sunflowers, between Coke bottles and milkweed, among all the waste and beauty of the world."

Who will mother poor Pecola, when her own mother cares more about the little white girl in the house she cleans? Not Claudia, a faithless friend. Not the sugar-brown hollyhocks girls from Meridian and Mobile who straighten their hair with Dixie peach and wash with Lifebuoy to rid themselves of "the dreadful funkiness of passion." Nor even those avatars of Black Motherhood who once upon a time felled trees, cut umbilical cords, loaded bales, rocked babies, plowed all day and came home nights "to nestle like plums under the limbs of their men." These avatars have declared themselves unavailable, past "lust and lactation, beyond tears and terror." Something's missing in this Lorain, Ohio, of kerosene lamps and dandelion soup and whores with names like Poland and China. Everybody seems to want Pecola's baby dead—"in a dark, wet place, its head covered with great O's of wool, the black face holding, like nickels, two clean black eyes, the flared nose, kissing-thick lips, and the living, breathing silk of black skin."

What's missing, as we will discover later on in Morrison's novels, is some figure like the Ancestor, that elder—down South, back in Africa—who connects her questing characters to the wisdom and solace of the textured past; the logic of lions. If Cholly Breedlove, *even* Cholly Breedlove, on his Georgia passage to find his father, had discovered such an Ancestor, he might never have raped his daughter. Cholly, instead, seems to be predicting *Jazz*:

> The pieces of Cholly's life could become coherent only in the head of a musician. Only those who talk their talk through the gold of curved metal, or in the touch of black-and-white rectangles and taut skins and strings echoing from wooden corridors, could give true form to his life. Only they would know how to connect the heart of a red watermelon to the asafetida bag to the muscadine to the flashlight . . . and come up with what all of that meant in joy, in pain, in anger, in love, and give it its final and pervading ache of freedom. Only a musician would sense, know, without even knowing that he knew, that Cholly was free. Dangerously free.

Sula flew away to big cities like Nashville and New York and came back, a plague of robins. "In that place, where they tore the nightshade and blackberry patches from their roots to make room for the Medallion City Golf Course, there was once a neighborhood." In *Sula* (1973), this neighborhood, a Bottom in the hills above an Ohio rivertown, is the narrator, a kind of chorus. It has its ways of dealing with crazies like Shadrack, witches like Sula, and white folks like us:

> They did not believe doctors could heal—for them, none had ever done so. They did not believe death was accidental—life might be, but death was deliberate. They did not believe Nature was ever askew—only inconvenient. Plague and drought were as "natural" as spring-time. If milk could curdle, God knows robins could fall. The purpose of evil was to survive it and they determined (without ever knowing they had made up their minds to do it) to survive floods, white people, tuberculosis, famine and ignorance. They knew anger well but not despair, and they didn't stone sinners for the same reason they didn't commit suicide—it was beneath them.

Which isn't to say that these stoical communities are invariably wise. There's something self-serving about their forbearance. ("As Reverend Deal moved into his sermon, the hands of the women unfolded like pairs of raven's wings and flew high above their hats in the air. . . . And they saw the Lamb's eye and the truly innocent victim: themselves.") They've a taste for scapegoats and pariahs. Lorain, after all, failed Pecola. Medallion feels better about itself with Sula around to behave so badly. Sula, who caused an innocent child to drown; Sula, who stole

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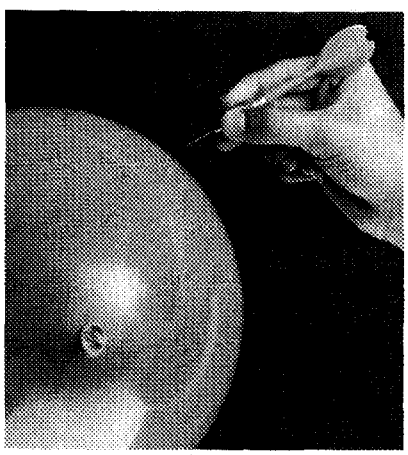

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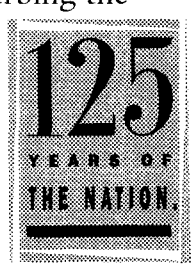

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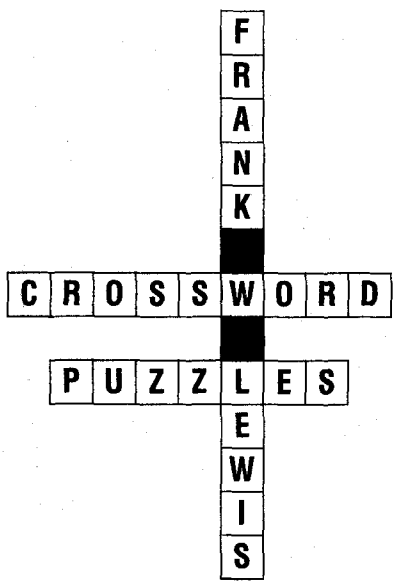

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her best friend's husband; Sula, who watched her mother burn to death; Sula, with the flowering birthmark that seems to Nel a rose, to Jude a snake, to Shadrack a fish—this Sula, laughing at their God, is "the most magnificent hatred" the Bottom has ever known. They lay broomsticks across their doors at night, sprinkle salt on porch steps. But no more than failed crops, sick children, rednecks, social workers or plague, will this strange young woman "keep them from their God."

Some God. No wonder the rain freezes, silvering Medallion. And Nel cries "a fine cry—loud and long—but it had no bottom and it had no top, just circles and circles of sorrow."

But Sula *isn't* evil: "Had she paints or clay, or knew the discipline of the dance, or strings; had she anything to engage her tremendous curiosity and her gift for metaphor, she might have exchanged the restlessness and preoccupation with whim for an activity that provided her with all she yearned for. And like any artist with no art form, she became dangerous." Whatever she found *elsewhere*, even South, it wasn't sufficient; it wasn't Ancestral. Only the Bottom will take her back in, and even Nel lets her down. Still, Morrison needs this return of the prodigal daughter as much as Nel, "like getting the use of an eye back." Who else can love as Sula loves Ajax?

> If I take a chamois and rub real hard on the bone, right on the ledge of your cheek bone, some of the black will disappear. It will flake away into the chamois and underneath there will be gold leaf. I can see it shining through the black. I know it is there. . . .
>
> And if I take a nail file or even Eva's old paring knife—that will do—and scrape away at the gold, it will fall away and there will be alabaster. The alabaster is what gives your face its planes, its curves. That is why your mouth smiling does not reach your eyes. Alabaster is giving it a gravity that resists a total smile. . . .
>
> Then I can take a chisel and small tap hammer and tap away at the alabaster. It will crack then like ice under the pick, and through the breaks I will see the loam, fertile, free of pebbles and twigs. For it is the loam that is giving you that smell.

Already with this black, gold and alabaster, three Deweys and one-legged Eva in her wagon, a plague of robins and a ghostly ball of fur, hair and muddy strings floating in the light, we have moved out of Faulkner and into García Márquez, where the mindscapes are miraculous.

For instance, blue silk wings and red velvet rose petals and a bag of human bones; a horse named President Lincoln, a cow named Grant and a hog named General Lee; peacocks and bobcats and a spice-sweet ginger smell at night "that made you think of the East and striped tents and the *sha-sha-sha* of leg bracelets. . . . the way freedom smelled, or justice, or luxury, or vengeance." If her other novels circle, and they do, *Song of Solomon* (1977) soars—from Not Doctor Street and No Mercy Hospital on Detroit's Southside, "where even love found its way with an ice pick"; to a ruined plantation, a cave of the dead and a witch named Circe, on the Susquehanna; to Shalimar, on nobody's map of Virginia, where everybody's name is Solomon and the children sing a riddle-song that proves on its decoding to be all about how you can ride the very air to Africa.

To be sure, we hear about Macon Dead Jr.'s moneymaking from his rent-houses and the lakeshore vacation cabins he builds for the black bourgeoisie. And we go with his son into bars and barbershops, to talk about Kennedy and Elijah and meet those Seven Days assassins who revenge themselves for Emmett Till and Birmingham. ("Hitler's the most natural white man in the world," says Guitar: "He killed Jews and Gypsies because he didn't have us.") We're vouchsafed details on life insurance, raffle tickets, policy slips, bootlegging, Playtex garterbelts and pink-veined marble, Dairy Queens and Belgian silk brocade, White Castles and domestic dread.

But *Song of Solomon* is really about naming, especially the ghosts. Macon Dead III is called "Milkman" because his mother nursed him a lot longer than, decently, she should have. But his father is Macon Dead Jr. and his grandfather was Macon Dead period, because of a drunken Union soldier on the journey north in a wagonload of ex-slaves. His aunt is called Pilate, his sisters Magdalene and First Corinthians, and his cousins Reba and Hagar because that's where the finger pointed in the family Bible. Circe asks Milkman, "Where'd you get a name like yours? White people name Negroes like race horses." Guitar says, "Niggers get their names the way they get everything else—the best way they can." Milkman thinks of the names black men got "from yearning, gestures, flaws, events, mistakes, weaknesses. Names that bore

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witness." His father dreams of an ancestor with onyx skin and "a name that was real. A name given to him at birth with love and seriousness. A name that was not a joke, nor a disguise, nor a brand name."

This is the name Milkman discovers, where Charlemagne turns into Shalimar, and Sugarman to Solomon, and the ghost who cries out "Sing!" is actually naming his Indian wife. Like a sort of bodhisattva-wannabe out of *Dream of the Red Chamber*, Milkman escapes his Northern matriarchy into this lush South of peaches and turkeys and Calvins and Luthers, where he finds in folk memory and child-song not only a black Daedalus but his own lost grandfather, who came to freedom "out of nowhere, as ignorant as a hammer and broke as a convict," and tamed the wilderness, and so, of course, "they shot the top of his head off."

Never mind that Guitar waits with a gun. Or whether we can altogether admire a Daedalus who flies, no frills, to Africa, leaving behind his wife and kids. What's compelling here is that, while Milkman never meets Solomon/Daedalus or his ghostly grandfather Jake, he does at last recognize his own Aunt Pilate. *Pilate* got him to go South, into American history and racial memory. *Pilate*—born without a navel ("a stomach as bald as a knee"); wearing her own name on a scrap of paper in the brass snuffbox earring; keeper of the eggs and bones; having hoed, fished, plowed and planted, grown vegetables, picked fruit, raised cattle, sold tobacco, made whiskey and talked to the dead—*Pilate* is the Ancestor, the Identity-Maker, an agency of levitation.

I fell off the truck with *Tar Baby* (1981). It still seems overly didactic, somehow brittle, her only novel you can't sing, the least operatic. Maybe if it had been more about Thérèse and Gideon and less about Jade, the model who has been to Paris, or Son, the dreadlocked drifter who wants only to go home again, I might have had more patience with her Caribbean island and its fearful fish, puzzled clouds, stingless bees, rain forests full of angel women and ghosts of blind slaves; the various royalties (Catherine the Great, Valerian, Maria Theresa) and so many sugar metaphors; all that anthropology and Caliban; Will Shakespeare meets Uncle Remus.

But Jade looks into the eyes of the wife-killer with the "Mau Mau, Attica, chain-gang hair" and sees "spaces, mountains, savannas." And Son looks into the eyes of this arty young woman who thinks "Picasso *is* better than an Itumba mask" and sees "gold, cloisonné and honey-colored silk." He won't like imperial New York, she'll *hate* down-home Eloe, and the rest is soldier ants.

Not quite, of course. There are wonderful arias in *Tar Baby* (about stolen labor, insupportable innocence and, warming up for *Jazz*, black women in the big city); and some licorice-stick lyricism ("the fruit of the banana trees puffed up and stiff like the fingers of gouty kings"); and Valerian may be right when he says that the typical anthropologist is "a purveyor of exotics . . . a cultural orphan who sought other cultures he could love without risk or pain."

Without Beloved, *our imagination had a heart-sized hole big enough to die from.*

Must, however, a white woman torture her baby while a white man listens to the Goldberg Variations in a greenhouse? When Jade gets stuck in tar, couldn't we have gotten along without those tree-women with "their sacred properties," their "pace of glaciers" and their smug faith "that they alone could hold together the stones of pyramids"? Just the news; hold the Gaia. Would Toni Morrison, after all she's done, want to live in Eloe any more than Jade does? I am sorry that for Son there'll never be lions or a mating dance; that he's stuck with dice instead of tusks, a job instead of a journey. But those are the breaks. I'd like to have been a Druid myself.

About Son and Jade, we're read this lesson: "One had a past, the other a future and each one bore the culture to save the race in his hands. Mama-spoiled black man, will you mature with me? Culture-bearing black woman, whose culture are you bearing?" While it's a lesson sufficient to float most modern novels, it seems thin for a Toni Morrison. She lets Son off too easily; and she denies, to Jade, all that leftover Sula.

But now we get a masterwork. *Beloved* (1988) imagines what's left out of the slave narratives. Morrison even went to Brazil to look at choke-collars and leg-irons you won't find in any of *our* museums, and then she wrote a ghost story about history. At its center is an act as awful as anything reported by the Hebrews, the Greeks or the Elizabethans. Inside *Beloved*'s circle of space/time—spellbound, dream-dazed—the living and the dead talk to and lay hands upon each other. Madness and memory cohabit. From this history, like a collective unconscious, the dead, like the repressed, return.

Though the novel begins in 1873, it has more than twenty years of explaining to do before we understand how Sethe, her 19-year-old daughter Denver and a ghost happen to be hiding from the neighbors and the past at 124 Bluestone Road in Cincinnati. We must go back to Sweet Home, Kentucky, in the early 1850s. Sethe, a teenage mother then, pregnant with her fourth child, remembers Sweet Home so: two white boys "with mossy teeth, one sucking my breast, the other holding me down, their bookreading teacher watching and writing it up." And the cowhide that left a scar-tree on her back that flowered red roses. And black boys "hanging from the most beautiful sycamore trees in the world." The flight as if from Egypt; Denver's birth in a boat, "under four summer stars" on the river passage to the free state of Ohio; and "one whole moon" of "unslaved life" before Schoolteacher on horseback arrived and Sethe like a black Medea raised her handsaw and Denver swallowed her sister's blood "right along with my mother's milk."

And this is what Paul D, "last of the Sweet Home men," recalls of Schoolteacher, Georgia prisons, the Civil War and his years on the road till Sethe; Sethe's husband, with his crazed head in the butter churn, "greased and flat-eyed as a fish"; Sixo, who had stopped speaking English "because there was no future in it," set on fire; a three-spoke neck collar and an iron mouth-bit; the rockpile and the chain gang; sleeping in coffins, hiding in caves and fighting for food with owls and pigs; bad whiskey, hissing grass, "song-murders," "laughing dead men" and "a witless colored woman jailed and hanged for stealing ducks she believed were her babies."

Paul D wants to put his story, of "sucking iron," right next to Sethe's story, of stolen milk and river passage, and imagine a future for them. But first he must chase the ghost out of the house. The ghost—a spiteful "pool of red and undulating light" that tips tables and leaves palmprints on the butter—is, of course, Sethe's murdered baby. Once

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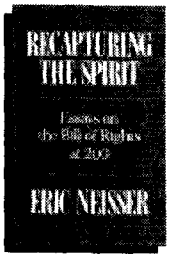

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chased, she'll be replaced by a huge young woman, risen from the water with "midnight skin," sugar-devouring, diamond-hungry, exactly the age Sethe's baby, grown up, would be: Beloved. And Beloved chases Paul D.

What chance have Paul D and Sethe? From his travels Paul knows it's best to love everything "just a little bit, so when they broke its back, or shoved it in a croaker sack, well, maybe you'll have a little love left over for the next one." Sethe misbelieves that "the future was a matter of keeping the past at bay"; her love is "too thick." Even the land isn't theirs. Sethe can't forgive herself for recalling the sycamores before she recalls the black boys hanging from them: "It made her wonder if hell was a pretty place too."

Morrison does a thousand splendid things in her circling. She introduces us for instance to Baby Suggs, Sethe's mother-in-law, the Ancestor, who used to preach of grace before she became ashamed of God and retired "to ponder colors" on her quilt, deciding, "There is no bad luck in the world but white folks." And to Amy, a barefoot white girl on her way to Boston to look for velvet, stopping just long enough to put spider webs on the bloody tree on Sethe's back and deliver Denver. And also to Stamp Paid: watchman, soldier, spy, busybody, tormented by the song and sadness of "the people of the broken necks, of fire-cooked blood and black girls who had lost their ribbons."

She acquaints us too with the unendingness of women's work, even out of slavery: at home, wringing out sheets "so tight the rinse water ran back up their arms," shoveling snow from the path to the outhouse, breaking ice from the rain barrel, scouring and boiling last summer's canning jars, packing mud in the hen house cracks and warming chicks with their skirts. Away from home, besides the cradling of white babies, there's laundry at the orphanage or asylum; corn shucking at the mill; fish to clean, offal to rinse, stores to sweep, lard to press, sausage to case-pack and tavern kitchens to hide in so white folks "didn't have to see them handle their food."

In fact, instead, these women gather in front of 124 (a way station, after all, for fugitive slaves, a place where history stopped), and their voices search "for the right combination," the code that breaks the back of words. When they find it there's "a wave of sound wide enough to sound deep water and knock the pods off chestnut trees. It broke over Sethe and she trembled like the baptized in its wash." Beloved, "a naked woman with fish for hair," "thunder black and glistening," runs from the house to the woods and the river and is gone. Exorcised. For now.

Amazing how all these little words of one, two or three syllables, strung together beadlike, turn into a necklace or a whip. (Shakespeare did it, too.) Put them together with the Baby Suggs "appetite for color" and helpful Cherokee Indians. Add Paul's longing "to get to a place where you could love anything you chose—not to need permission for desire." And find a woman like Sixo's: "a friend of my mind. . . . She gather me, man. The pieces I am, she gather them and give them back to me in all the right order. It's good, you know, when you got a woman who is a friend of your mind." But not in this history, which is out of happy endings.

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of hummingbirds with needle beaks as dead babies are offered up to a shameful God; a devouring past of everything that is unforgiven and denied; a hunger to eat all the love in the world—*Beloved* belongs on the highest shelf of our literature even if half a dozen canonized Wonder Bread Boys have to be elbowed off. I can't now picture our literature without it, between Whitman and Twain, the Other in Faulkner, an African Flannery O'Connor, and who knows what other cultures she's looked into, which masks she's put on like a shaman, her secret antihistamines. Where *was* this book that we've always needed? Without *Beloved*, our imagination of America had a heart-sized hole in it big enough to die from. It didn't win every prize it deserved, and the word was that some of the critics didn't believe in ghosts. Like Shakespeare's clowns and Freud's dreams, Morrison's ghosts always tell the truth. If I had voted against *Beloved*, I'd find it convenient, too, not to believe in ghosts.

"*Watch out for her; she can give you dreams.*" (Denver to Beloved, about their mother.)

Back to *Jazz*: Joe Trace, besides cosmetics, sells trust: "I make things easy." He has a sad eye "that let you look inside him, and a clear one that looks inside you." In his opinion, his wife, Violet, "takes better care of her parrot than she does me. Rest of the time, she's cooking pork I can't eat, or pressing hair I can't stand the smell of." He wishes he could remember their young love, coming north from Virginia, but has a tough time "trying to catch what it felt like." He tries to dismiss "the evil in my thoughts" because he isn't sure "the sooty music the blind twins were playing wasn't the cause. It can do that to you, a certain kind of guitar playing. Not like the clarinets, but close." What Joe wants at age 50 is to be free, not "to break loaves or feed the world on a fish. Nor to raise the war dead, but free to do something wild." In this, the City conspires.

Names again: Joe's name is "Trace" because when he was abandoned down South as a baby, his parents "left without a trace." He is that Trace.

Violet had her spells even before Joe met Dorcas: falling down in the street through "dark fissures in the globe light of the day"; conversations in her head with a corpse; "tears coming so fast she needs two hands to catch them." Once, she even stole a baby. But, mostly, till she went to Dorcas's funeral, she ironed hair and took care of her birds, who got to look at themselves in mirrors she arranged, including a parrot who said "Love you!" When she learns of Joe and Dorcas, she loses the birds and finds a knife. Later, she'll laugh at herself, "trying to do something bluesy, something hep, fumbling the knife, too late anyway." But the abandoned parrot keeps on crying at the window pane, in the snow: "Love you!" And the mirrors have nothing to look at.

"The children of suicides," we are told, "are hard to please and quick to believe no one loves them because they are not really here."

Dorcas, exactly like Josephine Baker, is a child of the East St. Louis race riots, which consumed her clothespin dolls and her parents. She's taken in by her Aunt Alice, who makes clothes (and do) while hating the City and the "complicated anger" and the "appetite" of its "dirty, get-on-down music." But this music, that "bends, falls to its knees to embrace them all, encourage them all . . . why don't you? since this is the it you've been looking for," is all Dorcas cares about besides

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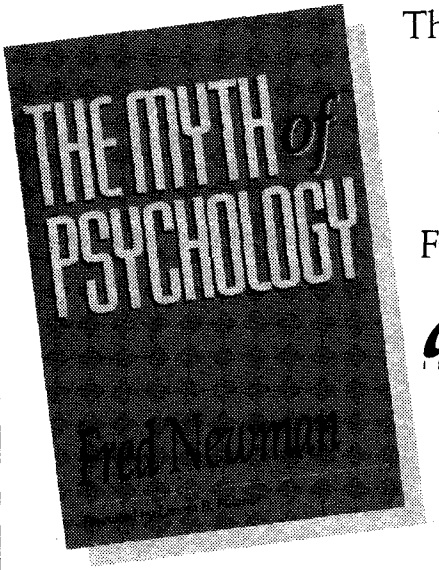

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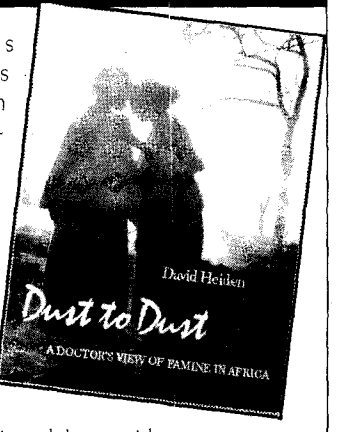

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movies and looking good, with her pencil-thin eyebrows and green shoes, despite "hoof marks" on her cheeks from acne. Is Dorcas the child Violet miscarried, or the one she tried to steal, or maybe Violet herself, equally motherless, archetypal orphan? Mothers and ghosts!

In *Jazz*, they are all trying to change the way they look, or in business to change the way somebody else looks, even with a knife.

So, too, is the City. Morrison has lived in New York City ever since she stopped teaching English to Stokely Carmichael and Claude Brown, down at Howard, in the nation's capital. But the only time she ever wrote of it till now was, briefly, in *Tar Baby*, where Son was bewildered and Jade transcendent: "New York oiled her joints and she moved as though they were oiled. Her legs were longer here, her neck really connected her body to her head." *Jazz*, though, sings the City like a Whitman—"thriftless, warm, scary and full of amiable strangers"; the razor-slant of daylight and night skies gone so purple with an orange heart that "the clothes of the people on the streets glow like dance-hall costumes"; "bright steel rocking above the shade below" and blocks, lots and side streets where what goes on is "anything the strong can think of and the weak will admire"; where there's a breath each morning that brightens the eye, the talk and the expectations like laughing gas; where "in halls and offices people are sitting around thinking future thoughts about projects and bridges and fast-clicking trains underneath," because "History is over, you all, and everything's ahead at last." To this city black people came, from "want and violence," and stayed, "to look at their number, hear themselves in an audience, feel themselves moving down the street among hundreds of others who moved the way they did, and who, when they spoke, regardless of the accent, treated language like the same intricate, malleable toy designed for their play."

Joe and Violet rode north in 1906 in the colored section of the Southern Sky:

> When the train trembled approaching the water surrounding the City, they thought it was like them: nervous at having gotten there at last, but terrified of what was on the other side. . . . The quick darkness in the carriage cars when they shot through a tunnel made them wonder if maybe there was a wall ahead to crash into or a cliff hanging over nothing. The train shivered with them at the thought . . . and the trembling became the dancing under their feet. Joe stood up, his fingers clutching the baggage rack above his head. He felt the dancing better that way.

And so the young country couple, "laughing and tapping back at the tracks," danced into the City, which is itself a kind of jazz improvising its days and nights and blues, its dangerous freedom. And here they are—after the railroad flat in the Tenderloin, working domestic service and white folks' shoe leather, the cleaning of fish at night and of toilets in the daytime, the riots of 1917—in a Harlem in 1926 where there are mailboxes but no high schools, bootleggers but no banks. And suddenly, a Dorcas. When Joe went looking for the little tramp with a gun, who was he really missing? When Violet went with a knife to the funeral, who was she really cutting up?

If you know Toni Morrison at all by now, you know she'll go South again; if need be, all the way back to antebellum, not only for the servitude, the foreclosures, the lynchings and the mutilations but for those ghostly waters and that bag of ancestral bones. For that phantom father who came home at last from his politicking with his gold ingots, reed whistles, dollar bills and a tin of Frieda's Egyptian Hair Pomade, too late to save Violet's mother, Rose Dear, from throwing herself down a well "so narrow, so dark it was pure, breathing relief to see her stretched in a wooden box." For the trail of ruined honeycombs, bits and leavings of stolen victuals, the blue-black birds with the bolt of red on their wings and the gopher-freezing music of running water and high-tree wind, in search of Wild, *Joe's* mother, and her secret cave and her circle of stones and buttons of bone. This is the South of their own minds: why Joe has eyes of different colors and Violet falls through cracks, and what the music's all about—"I could hear," we are told by the Voice that narrates *Jazz*, "the men playing out their maple-sugar hearts, tapping it from four-hundred-year-old trees and letting it run down the trunk, wasting it because they didn't have a bucket to hold it and didn't want one either"—and why, when she bleeds to death, even Dorcas, while seeing the bright oranges, also hears something: "Listen. I don't know who is that woman singing but I know the words by heart." It is also, of course, the ultimate South of Sula: past black and gold and alabaster, down to the fertile loam and a song of reconciliation.

I haven't even mentioned Malvonne, who lives alone with "other people's sto-

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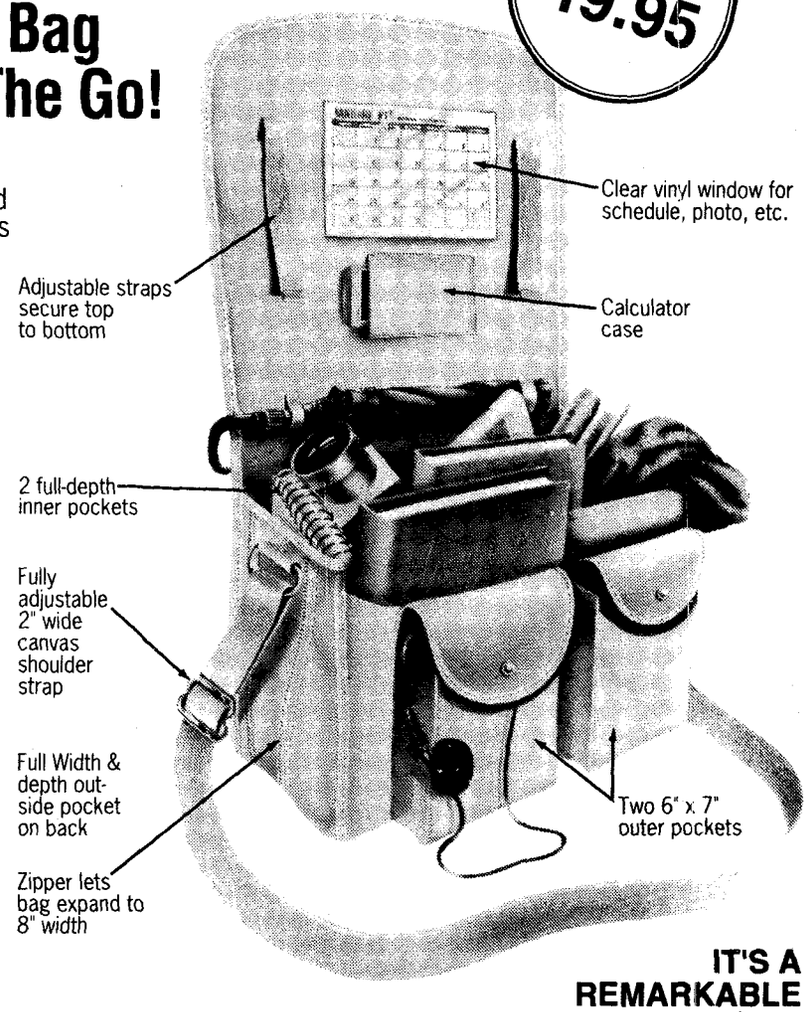
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ries printed in small books," or her nephew Sweetness, who steals uncanceled letters from the Post Office. Nor Neola, partly paralyzed since her fiancé abandoned her, "as though she held the broken pieces of her heart together in the crook of a frozen arm." Nor True Belle and Vera Lee and Golden Gray, whose own father comes as such a shock. Nor Hunter, nor Acton, and not even Felice, who is everything that Dorcas wasn't, and whose father is happy working on the Pullman. No matter what our narrator tells us is going to happen after Felice enters the novel, "with an Okeh record under her arm and carrying some stewmeat wrapped in butcher paper, another girl with four marcelled waves on either side of her head," nobody *this* time is going to shoot *anybody*.

You will have to think about who's telling you this story, and I might as well admit I got too clever doing so. Picking up on the epigraph to *Jazz*—from "Thunder, Perfect Mind" in *The Nag Hammadi*—and knowing that Morrison now spends part of every week at Princeton with Elaine Pagels, who wrote the book on *The Gnostic Gospels*, I said, alas, "Aha!" "Thunder, Perfect Mind" is the revelation of a *feminine* power: "I am the whore, and the holy one. I am the wife and the virgin. I am [the mother] and the daughter . . . " And so on. All this missed the obvious point.

This Voice, with a "sweettooth" for pain, complains that she hasn't any muscles so can't defend herself; has lived too long in her own mind, really ought to get out more, but is tired of having been "left standing" while her partner falls asleep; accuses herself of carelessness when things go wrong; wants to "dream a nice dream" for the reader and "be the language that wishes him well, speaks his name, wakes him when his eyes need to be open"; feels predictable and even a bit false—"What would I be without a few brilliant spots of blood to ponder?"—and apostrophizes:

> I love the way you hold me, how close you let me be to you. I like your fingers on and on, lifting, turning. I have watched your face for a long time now, and missed your eyes when you went away from me.

It finally occurred to me that I wasn't being talked to by a goddess, or a clarinet: "If I were able I'd say it. Say make me, remake me. You are free to do it and I am free to let you because look, look. Look where your hands are. Now." Where my hands were *then* was holding on to my copy of *Jazz*. And, of course, the Voice is the book itself, this physical object, our metatext . . . a whimsy and a wickedness worthy of a Nabokov. And out of this Pandora's box comes not only "something rogue, something else you have to figure in before you can figure it out" but all the love in the world—the love that Beloved was so hungry for, and Pecola never got from anybody, and Joe Trace thought he couldn't remember, and Sula knew would come to her only after "Lindbergh sleeps with Bessie Smith and Norma Shearer makes it with Stepin Fetchit"; even Hagar's "graveyard love" for Milkman, the kind that made "women pull their dresses over their heads and howl like dogs" and sat men down in doorways "with pennies in their mouths"; but most of all, with a wink and all that radiance, Toni Morrison's surpassing love for her people and her readers.

Jazz, yes; but also Mozart. □

In the Middle of the Muddle

KATHA POLLITT

LIFE ITSELF: Abortion in the American Mind. *By Roger Rosenblatt. Random House. 194 pp. $20.*

As the war over abortion heats up and *Roe v. Wade* goes down for the count, the instant experts sit down at their word processors. Why should this issue paralyze the nation's attention when the solution—i.e., the writer's own pet notion—is so obvious? Sometimes the writer's aim is to deliver the decisive, crushing blow to the arguments of the other side: the final 1,000 words. Here at *The Nation*, we get a steady sprinkling of unsolicited essays from clever pro-choicers who imagine that the anti-choicers are merely laboring under some theo-biological mistake. ("You mean, the sperm really isn't a tiny little person that just gets bigger in the womb? Oh. Never mind.") On the other side, there's Christopher Hitchens, who famously claimed in these pages a few years back that "anyone" who saw a sonogram or leafed through an embryology textbook would agree with him that abortion took a human life and should be outlawed—which must have come as news to the 84 percent of American gynecologists and obstetricians who favor legal abortion, and to millions of pro-choice ultrasounded moms like me as well.

More often, though, the instant experts come up with compromises: Forget the committed on each side and let the real America decide. Permit abortion during the first trimester—or before "brain birth" (whenever that is), or during the "pre-embryonic phase," as some Catholic theologians have tentatively suggested. Or permit it for certain reasons—rape, incest, the life of the mother, severe fetal defects. Or just get it out of the courts and onto the Congressional agenda (*The New Republic*'s editorial line), or back to the states or even the county and municipal level, as Evan Galbraith, former U.S. Ambassador to France, loopily suggested in *The Wall Street Journal*. (Why stop there? Let the block associations decide!) Or—I know!—let's admit that abortion is murder, selfish, evil, and let's make it *unnecessary*. Bernard Avishai, contributing editor of the *Harvard Business Review*, suggested in a 1985 *New York Times* Op-Ed piece that setting up a welfare state would do the trick; Hitchens, another welfare-stater, was all for birth control and sex education and a national adoption service.

What all these Brilliant Ideas and Grand Compromises have in common—besides the interesting fact that it is invariably men who propose them—is a certain kind of arrogance and a certain kind of naïveté. It is arrogant, is it not, to step into an ongoing debate without studying the literature, knowing the issues, having a good grasp of the facts? A great deal has been written on just about every aspect of abortion: historical, legal, political, sociological, statistical, cross-cultural, philosophical, medical, psychological. Abortion is, after all, not just a moral issue; it is also a social phenomenon, with connections that can be uncovered and discussed, to other social phenomena. Rarely, however, does an abortion autodidact show signs of even knowing that this literature (except for Kristin Luker's *Abortion and the Politics of Motherhood*, which is often cited for its sympathetic view of anti-choice activists) exists. No, the subject was born when they sat down at their desks. Imagine the derisive laughter if I set out to resolve a comparably complex issue—race relations, say, or the Middle East—having done as little homework! But how women should live, what women should do—every man thinks he's an instant expert on that.

Ignorance is one reason the solutions

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and compromises usually have a kind of naïve, sometimes even crackpot, feel to them. More birth control? Sure, but according to the Alan Guttmacher Institute, 43 percent of unintended pregnancies occur in women who are using contraceptives: Birth control fails *a lot*. A welfare state? Again, a great idea, but it doesn't work in Sweden. Sweden has a system of social benefits and family supports that is more likely to be established on the moon than in the United States (where, as none of the kinder, gentler anti-choicers have noticed, the trend is to cut, rather than expand, programs benefiting women and children). But even so, Swedish women abort at a hefty rate of 25 percent of all pregnancies. Restrictions based on fetal development? Doesn't sound so bad, if it brought us social peace: As it is, 90 percent of abortions occur during the first trimester. But who has late abortions? The "hard cases"—the 12-year-olds, the rape and incest victims, the poor, the battered, the sick, the women carrying severely defective fetuses. Thus, time-based restrictions would have the ironic consequence of permitting abortion to middle-class urban professional women—the ones who have all those "convenience" abortions—while denying them to those who are in the most horrific circumstances. France has a time-based system—abortion is illegal after twelve weeks—and France has a lot of illegal abortion. Germany, on the other hand, has a reasons-based system, and Germany has a lot of illegal abortion too.

There is, I am trying to say, no silver bullet that will make abortion go away, and there never will be, even if they put contraceptives in the drinking water along with the fluoride and twenty-four-hour day care centers on every street. Being a mother is just too big a job for women to take on merely because they missed a pill or trusted a boyfriend to pull out. Carrying a child is just too big a physical and emotional event, with too many social consequences, whether or not one keeps the child—a fact ignored by those, like Hitchens and President Bush, who think adoption can solve the problem. (They also overlook the fact that the adoption market, small to begin with, would be saturated within a year could abortion be successfully banned.) The reasons women abort are too various to be solved by a couple of quick fixes, and they include too many deep, long-term social transformations that are not likely to reverse themselves, among which not the least is one women never get credit for: an increasingly complex sense of what good parenting is, of what children need—in money, time, love, attention, patience—to become independent, reasonably happy adults. We will never see again the days when another baby meant another pair of hands on the family farm—and there were lots of abortions down on those farms anyway.

Still, the fixers keep coming forward with their ingenious, or would-be ingenious, solutions. The latest is Roger Rosenblatt, formerly of *Time* and *U.S. News & World Report*, current editor at large for *Life*, and *MacNeil-Lehrer* talking head. Excerpted in *The New York Times Magazine*, and published with a major publicity fanfare, *Life Itself* takes on some big questions: Why has abortion become such a major issue in post-*Roe* America when it isn't such a big issue in other countries and wasn't even criminalized in our own until the mid-nineteenth century? Why is it so resistant to compromise, when "we"—a big word with Rosenblatt—seem able to reason to-

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gether on other vexing topics, or at least to live with our differences? And how can we find a formula that will allow us to defuse the abortion issue and heal the social fabric?

In other words, *Life Itself* is a perfect example of fixerism: It asks the wrong questions, gives the wrong answers and offers a false solution. Along the way, Rosenblatt offers various quick tours—abortion in law and religion throughout world history, abortion as viewed by pro-choicers, pro-lifers and assorted Iowans in between, abortion as a marker for a grab bag of American traits and ideas. Some of this material is interesting and worth pointing out: It is useful to remember that in many ancient civilizations, abortion was less a crime against the fetus than a crime against the father of the fetus. The Pennsylvania State Legislature, which included a husband-notification requirement in its bill restricting abortion, would have felt right at home in old Rome. Useful too, to recall that the Catholic Church distinguished until 1869 between abortion before and after quickening, much as the hierarchy would like to forget it now. But much of the historical material has a canned feel, like the research file for a *Time-Life* "think piece." A glance at the bibliography confirms how little Rosenblatt boned up: Only fifteen books actually deal with abortion, five of those with Catholic views of the subject, and only one (Angela Bonavoglia's *The Choices We Made: Twenty-Five Women Speak Out About Abortion*) with the actual experience of abortion in contemporary America. I don't want to make too much of this—I'm a journalist too—but to my mind someone who finds a biography of Jonathan Edwards more relevant to abortion politics than, say, Linda Gordon's *Woman's Body, Woman's Right*, or Rosalind Petchesky's *Abortion and Woman's Choice*, or Zillah Eisenstein's *The Female Body and the Law*, or, for that matter, a five-year file of *Family Planning Perspectives*, is bound to quickly find himself where angels fear to tread.

But then, that is where Rosenblatt is happiest—making large, cloudy generalizations, false paradoxes and irrelevant arty observations. Consider, for example, his assertion that both pro- and anti-choicers share a uniquely American optimism: The pro-choicers think the pregnant woman is entitled to a self-determined future, the pro-lifers want the same for the fetus. So? He could equally well have said the two sides share a uniquely American pessimism: The pro-choicers think bearing an unwanted child automatically forecloses a woman's future, the pro-lifers are obsessed with the fetus because only the unborn are free from sin and corruption. Except for his surprisingly down-to-earth suggestion that male abortion opponents want to keep women out of the job market and under the masculine thumb, most of Rosenblatt's points about the American character are familiar half-truths: Yes, we are puritanical, but nothing like what we were—what would Jonathan Edwards have made of the immense middle-American popularity of homemade porn videos and Dr. Ruth? Or they are intellectual thumb-twiddling, like his speculation (he admits it's a stretch) that abortion is much on our minds because:

> Since America and Americans know, and to an extent are defined by, isolation, we have an acute appreciation of the state of the orphan. The country began as an orphan, and later became an orphan by choice, albeit the world's most powerful baby, like Gargantua. The idea of the child alone, with whom

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we naturally sympathize, may affect the views of abortion in one of two ways. Those who approve of abortion detest the prospect of the unwanted, isolated child. Those who condemn it see the isolated, unprotected child as vulnerable in the womb.

The country became an orphan by choice? What is that, exactly? Why not an emancipated minor? A teenage girl who chooses the judicial out (the Declaration of Independence) from the parental consent requirement of George III? Two pages later, Rosenblatt has moved on to the idea of progress, with the prolifers as nostalgic lovers of the forest primeval and pro-choicers as admirers of "America as the house of industry and invention, in which the best of America may be realized by paving the wilderness with parking lots." Parking lots? *Parking Lots?* This is not thinking, it's free association.

Rosenblatt's penchant for cursory treatment of irrelevant Big Ideas (besides optimism, progress and orphans, there's redemption, humanism, social science and "America's darker impulses") helps make *Life Itself* seem at once padded and thin, a magazine essay that some bright agent or editor suggested expanding into a book. As it turns out, neither the grand tour of world-historical attitudes on abortion nor the Bill Moyersish disquisition on American uniqueness ("Americans, historically, are moral worriers") has much to do with the book's real argument, which is actually quite simple. It goes as follows: The abortion absolutists have monopolized the debate, but most Americans—"we"—fall somewhere in between in their views on abortion. "We" are ambivalent. On the one hand "we" think it is some sort of killing and that many women kill fetuses for insufficiently serious reasons; on the other hand, "we" think fetus-killing should remain legal, in some or all circumstances. Rosenblatt relies here on polls conducted by the anti-choice movement, which doesn't seem wise; when Planned Parenthood phrases the questions, it gets different answers. Certainly it's strange that Rosenblatt, who says he is pro-choice, would accept the numbers of the other side, but it goes along with his curious penchant for anti-choice language: It's always the fetus, and sometimes the unborn child, never the embryo (the accurate, rarely used word for what is aborted during the first trimester). We hear a lot about convenience abortions (which ones are those, exactly?) and about "lucrative" abortion clinics and the mystery of life and the miracle of birth.

How can we achieve consensus and let "the national healing" begin? Here's Rosenblatt's Grand Compromise: Permit abortion, but discourage it. Well, abortion is unobtainable in 83 percent of American counties, increasingly hemmed in by legal restrictions and qualifications, defunded by the federal government and thirty-seven states, banned on Indian reservations and in military hospitals and now not even mentionable in family planning clinics that receive federal funds. So you might think we'd already put the discouragement part of the formula into practice. But what Rosenblatt actually means is: Keep it legal and equally accessible for all—no Medicaid cutoffs, no parental notification or consent. He is, in spite of everything, a pro-choicer. "Discourage" is a sloppy, or a misleading, way of saying "discourage its necessity"—through sex education, birth control, a national health plan and unspecified measures to ameliorate "conditions of ignorance, poverty, the social self-destruction of fragmented families and the loss of spiritual values in general."

The permit-but-discourage formula has the advantage of looking like a centrist position, which is why William Safire recently recommended to Bill Clinton that he adopt that very phrase as his own abortion stand. And it has a rights-mean-responsibilities Clintonesque ring to it: Yes, but no. I do, but I don't. In reality, though, it is not compromise at all: It is the straight Planned Parenthood position, as expressed by none other than Faye Wattleton herself on page 27 of Rosenblatt's book! There isn't a pro-choicer alive today who does not support sex ed, widely available contraception and access to medical services for poor women, and most would go a lot further to make it easier for women to plan and raise their families—school-based clinics, day care, parental leave, flextime, tough enforcement of child support payments by nonmarried and divorced fathers, and so on and on and on. Rosenblatt spends barely two pages getting out his program (ameliorate poverty how, exactly? a federal jobs program? comparable worth? direct payments to mothers?). He gives a longer presentation in the publicity interview included with my review copy, with lots more helpful abortion-discouragers like "build family unity." Maybe Random House was as puzzled as I was.

There are a couple of interesting things

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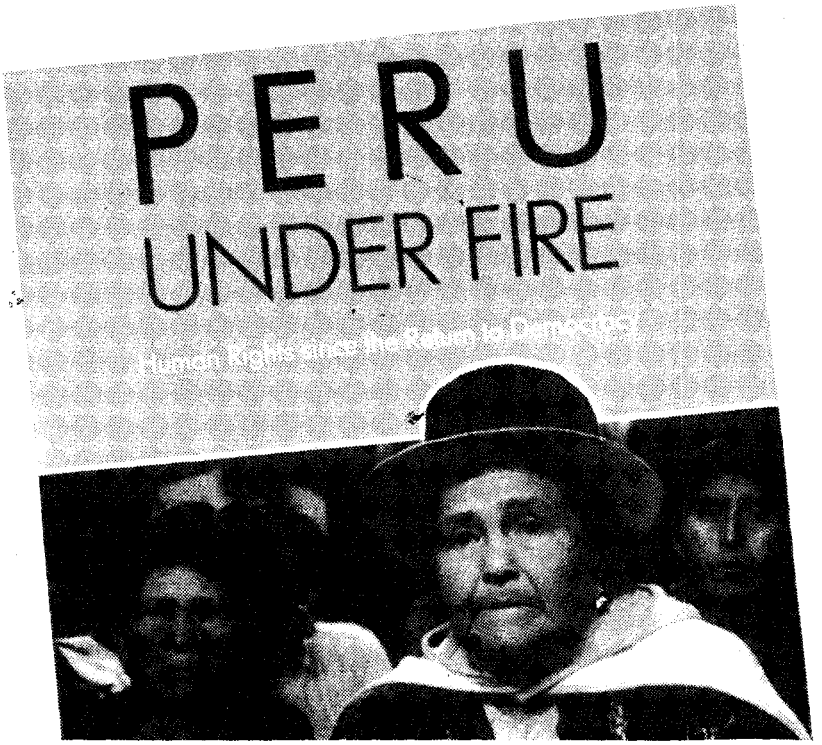

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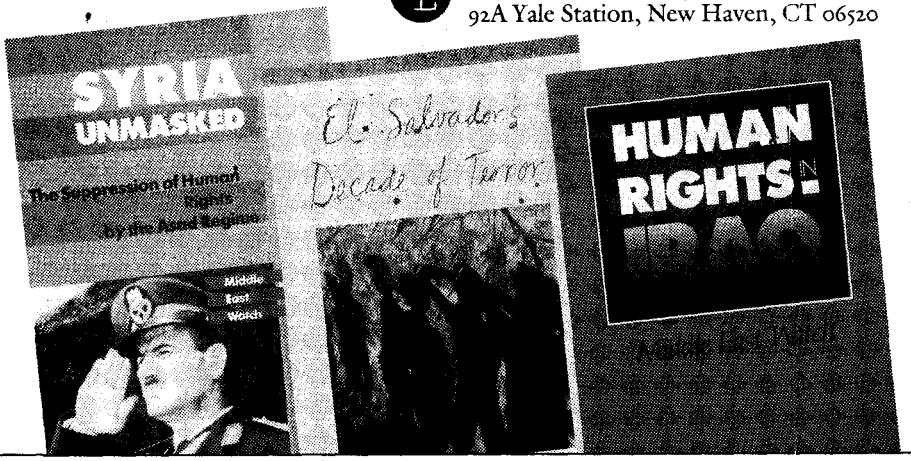

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about "permit but discourage." Not the least of them is Rosenblatt's own cursory interest in what either term actually means. Does "permit" mean "make genuinely accessible to all"—reinstating abortion at public hospitals as a matter of public policy, for example? Funding abortion clinics through Planned Parenthood or other Title X family-planning providers? Declaring unconstitutional state and local regulations that make opening new clinics virtually impossible? Or is that too encouraging? And what about "discourage"? Sex education is just a phrase: What do we teach the children that will effectively lessen the teen pregnancy rate? And *how* do we make birth control more accessible? After all, even today, anyone can buy a condom at virtually any drugstore in the country. Do we need to make contraception free? Allow non-doctors to prescribe the Pill? Lots of teenage girls don't seek birth control because they're scared of pelvic exams. Do we do away with them for the young? I'm not saying Rosenblatt need dot every i and cross every t. But he does not seem to understand that actually realizing either "permit" or "discourage" requires more than a wish and a slogan. In practice, carrying out either term successfully would intensify, not lessen, the abortion debate.

This is so for two reasons. In the first place, the "muddled middle" he admires—exemplified by a few dozen Iowans he interviewed on a quick trip last summer—are just as muddled about contraception, sex education and other abortion-decreasers as they are about abortion itself. The putative personhood of the fetus is only one of the issues at stake in abortion: The others—sexual freedom for teenage girls, the independence of women, the declining authority of parents and husbands, the changing shape of the family, the severing of sex and reproduction, the perceived excessive license of blacks—are all issues that arise around contraception, sex education, and state support for single and working mothers as well. That is, indeed, why we do not have anywhere near enough of these desiderata already, even in Iowa.

There's another reason why "permit but discourage" will not defuse the abortion debate. Good information and effective birth control would surely lower the number of crisis pregnancies; a national health service would cover the cost of bearing a child to term, which would help a bit; and, of course, ameliorating poverty and family crisis would be lovely. But people who find 1.6 million annual abortions a national scandal are not likely to relax if it's only a million, although such a reduction would be a public-health triumph barely imaginable under current political conditions: In constant dollars, public funding for contraception has declined by one-third in the past decade, after all, with barely a squeak from the "muddled middle." And the organized anti-choice activists would barely notice the difference: one, because to them, a single abortion is too many, and two, because most of them oppose sex ed and contraception as vehemently as they oppose abortion itself. The Catholic Church has done everything in its power here in New York City to prevent realistic sex education and the distribution of condoms in public schools. Where AIDS does not persuade, teen pregnancy is not likely to. "Permit but discourage" is only a compromise to the pro-choice side, and then only because it seems to imply that abortion should be a cause of shame or guilt. To the pro-lifers, it's loss-loss: Abortion stays legal and even more accessible—and now they're teaching about oral sex in schools to boot! I can see the headlines in the *New York Post* already.

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This last point shows how thoroughly Rosenblatt went off the tracks at the beginning, when he scorned both organized abortion camps as equally hotheaded, fanatical and totalizing. The fact is, they're not. Only one side wants to force its views on the other. Only one side commits violence against the other. The pro-lifers do millions of dollars' worth of damage to abortion clinics every year—bombings, arson, vandalism. Has a single one of the thousands of fake abortion clinics set up by the anti-choice movement been harmed? Do pro-choicers send death threats to fake-clinic personnel, picket their homes, frighten their children, or telephone the families of the women who visit them? Do we hurl ourselves at homes for unwed mothers urging pregnant girls to choose abortion as medically safer than pregnancy and less traumatic than giving up a child for adoption? Are we allied with politicians who consistently vote against social benefits for women and children and in favor of big military budgets and capital punishment? It is only at the level of language and symbol that the two sides appear to be a matched set: We talk about women's lives, they talk about fetal lives; they wave a fetus, we wave a coat hanger. In real life, we stage the largest demonstration in the history of Washington, D.C.; they stage Operation Rescue. Our side talks *endlessly*—too much for my taste, but Rosenblatt seems not to have tuned in—about the moral seriousness of abortion, the pain and guilt and fear that attend it; their side says things like rape victims exude a special substance that prevents pregnancy (this from Stephen Freind, author of the Pennsylvania bill) and inserts into the Republican Party platform an abortion plank that does not allow an exception, even to save the mother's life.

It is only in the land of *Time-Life* that there are equivalences here. Why? Because mass-market journalists suspect all strongly held conviction unless it is one that the muddled middle already holds, and are indifferent to any uncomfortable realities that blunder into the bland, moralizing center—the news media's own private Iowa, where the tall corn grows. The *Time-Lifers* would like every debate to be structured as extremes-against-the-middle and to last for fifty minutes. As a matter of fact, Rosenblatt suggests in the publicity interview that a televised town meeting run by Peter Jennings would be an ideal way to have "a different kind of a discussion that will let out all the complexities." Just what we need! An-

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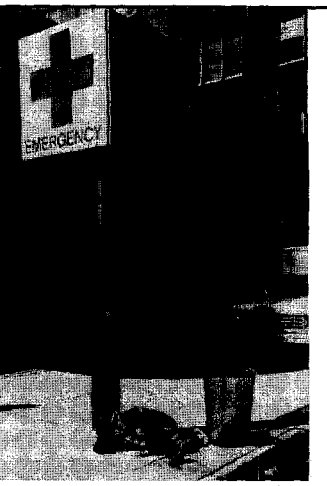

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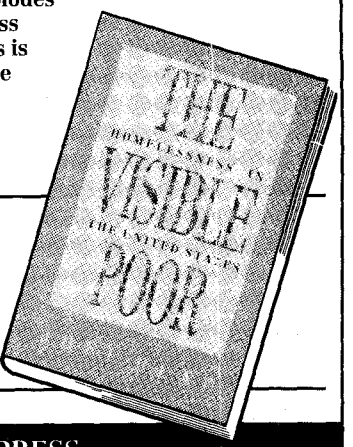

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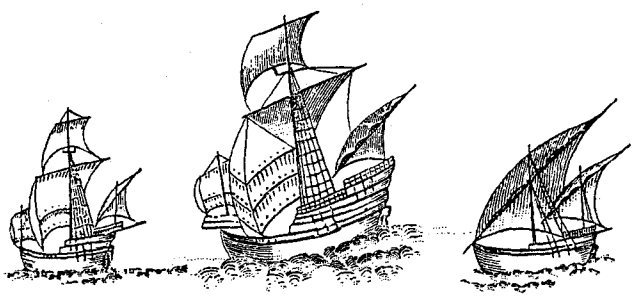

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comes to the warp suffers. The weft is shuttling
backward, threads raveled like so many Roman

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A California Epic

PETER SCHRAG

THE CAMPAIGN OF THE CENTURY: Upton Sinclair's Race for Governor of California and the Birth of Media Politics. *By Greg Mitchell. Random House. 635 pp. $27.50.*

On August 28, 1934, the darkest time of the Depression, Upton Sinclair, novelist, muckraker, socialist, won the Democratic primary for governor of California and thereby set in motion what Greg Mitchell calls "the campaign of the century." The reference is not to Sinclair's own campaign, which was amateurish and clumsy, but to that of the great force that came to be arrayed against him: the big Hollywood studios, which produced fake "newsreels" warning of the disastrous consequences should Sinclair win; the state's major newspapers, which relentlessly attacked and ridiculed him while freezing out coverage of his campaign; the downtown law firms in San Francisco and Los Angeles; the large corporations; and the armada of public relations experts and media consultants who have since become familiar in American electoral politics.

It makes a great story—no election before or since has had such a cast of characters—and Mitchell relates it as a day-to-day narrative with vivid, telling detail that makes it both good history and a wonderful read: Franklin Roosevelt, leading the starry-eyed Sinclair to believe that he would support him, then sitting out the election on the sidelines; Cecil B. De Mille, Louis B. Mayer, Harry Cohn and other Hollywood producers assessing their employees and actors for the war chest that was used against Sinclair and threatening to move the industry to New York or Florida if he won; the Throttlebottomish Frank Merriam, known as "Old Baldy," the Republican candidate, who became almost invisible and who complained to his supporters that they never let him speak; Ray Haight, the Progressive lawyer, nominally a Republican, who had voted for Norman Thomas in 1932, supported the New Deal and was now the third candidate in the race; publisher William Randolph Hearst, sending orders back to his editors in California as he was running around Germany with actress Marion Davies trying to arrange an audience with Hitler; evangelist Aimee Semple McPherson, appearing as an avenging angel at a Los Angeles anti-Sinclair pageant to rescue an endangered Statue of Liberty and warn that the Red enemy "is at your gates"; Kyle Palmer, the political editor of the *Los Angeles Times*, telling Turner Catledge of *The New York Times* that "we don't go in for all that kind of crap . . . of being obliged to print both sides. We're going to beat this son of a bitch Sinclair any way we can." (I should point out that the McClatchy newspapers, for which I work, devoted one

Peter Schrag is editorial page editor of the Sacramento Bee.

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breathless article after another to Haight, whom they supported. When they mentioned Sinclair or Merriam, it was usually to attack them.)

The base of Sinclair's campaign was EPIC—End Poverty in California—a network of local organizations committed to his plan of putting unemployed workers and farmers onto idle or tax-delinquent land and factories under state supervision and thus back to work. EPIC proposed to tax corporations to help finance the system, payable in goods and services, and thereby create a new socialized economy that would operate through barter and collectivized ownership.

Sinclair called it production for use rather than profit, and while it may have been naïve, at a time when 10 million Americans, or one-fifth of the labor force, were unemployed, and when there were violent textile strikes in the East—in North Carolina that summer, National Guardsmen bayoneted two strikers; in Maine, buildings were stoned and cars overturned; in Massachusetts, strikers imprisoned 300 workers in a mill—it's not surprising that Sinclair left much of the California establishment in panic. "This old Sinclair," said Will Rogers, "has throwed such a scare into these rich folks that they won't stop shiverin' till this thing is over."

But what may have panicked them as much as the message was the candidate himself. The author of *The Jungle* and scores of other novels and muckraking tracts was probably the best-known writer in America, an earnest crusader who had not been afraid to take on everything from the meatpacking industry to the Boy Scouts. But as a politician he tended to be a sanctimonious innocent; he had never held office and the only thing he had ever organized, a commune in New Jersey, failed. A militant prohibitionist, certain of the rectitude of his causes, he reminded one sympathetic visitor of nothing so much as a dowdy Methodist minister. His friend H.L. Mencken called him "an incurable romantic, wholesale believer in the obviously not so. . . . I know of no one in all this vast paradise of credulity who gives a steadier and more heroic credit to the intrinsically preposterous."

Together, those things—his writings, his inability to stop talking, his political naïveté—provided rich ammunition for the campaign against him. Every day Harry Chandler's *Los Angeles Times* ran quotes on its front page from Sinclair's books and tracts, some of them selectively edited, some not: attacks on the churches, the schools, even on marriage itself. The American Legion, Sinclair had said, "would like to take your schools and make 100,000 little West Points." Christianity, he had written, was the "shield and arrow of predatory economic might." As to the sanctity of marriage, "I have had such a belief [but] I have it no longer."

But the heart of the campaign was more immediate—and recognizable to anyone who follows contemporary California politics: Opponents charged that if Sinclair won, business would rush out of the state and hordes of the unemployed—tramps, vandals, radicals—would rush in; in fact, they were arriving already. Sinclair himself reinforced the message when he told reporters who asked about it that "I told Harry Hopkins in Washington that if I am elected half the unemployed of the United States will come to California, and he will have to make plans to take care of them." Although it was probably meant as a joke, it was no laughing matter, and Sinclair's effort to dig himself out only made things worse. The only way to keep the unemployed from coming, he explained, was to make conditions so bad that no one would want to come. The headlines in the *L.A. Times* were predictable: "Every pauper is coming," the paper would say, a "locust swarm" that would (to change the metaphor) make California's open spaces "look like the interior of a box of sardines." Fear of the imminent appearance of vandal hordes became the theme for something not seen before in American politics: a campaign of posed photos and studio-produced movie shorts shown as newsreels in theaters all over California purporting to depict the bums getting off the trains to seek Sinclair's socialist heaven. Simultaneously the studios also created something called *California Election News*, films devoted to "interviews" with people in the street in which the lazy, the shiftless and those with foreign accents and ethnic faces, often Jewish, inevitably supported Sinclair, while clean-cut Americans voiced their strong opposition. Los Angeles attorney H.L. Sacks no doubt was not the only one to berate Louis B. Mayer for fostering anti-Semitism with his shorts.

And yet neither the message nor the ugliness was new. Although Mitchell argues that "it was the riotous 1934 race for Governor of California" that pointed American elections down the path of attack advertising, distortion and voter manipulation that the nation now regards as commonplace, only the media were different. After the campaign was over, producer Irving Thalberg, who helped create

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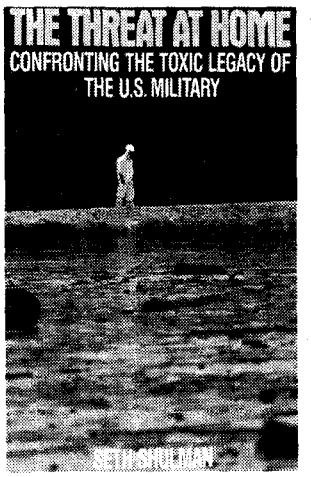

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the Inquiring Cameraman shorts against Sinclair, recalled his own days opposing Tammany Hall as a boy orator for the socialists in New York at the turn of the century. "Nothing is unfair in politics," he told actor Fredric March. "Fairness in an election is a contradiction in terms." Indeed, Mitchell himself points out that the tactic of intimidating large blocks of Sinclair voters with official warnings that there would be secret indictments for large-scale voter fraud (issued by, among others, Alameda County District Attorney and Republican campaign chairman Earl Warren) was invented in New York. And some pamphlets used against Sinclair were copies in toto, with only the name changed, of pamphlets used against Minnesota's self-described radical Governor, Floyd Olson.

Nor were the themes new. The fear of alien hordes, whether Chinese, Okie or Hispanic, is a familiar refrain in California politics. Just a few weeks ago, Governor Pete Wilson, joined by much of the business community, warned that businesses and jobs were fleeing California even as it was being besieged by immigrants and single mothers drawn by the state's generous welfare benefits. California, he said, is a welfare magnet.

Mitchell is no doubt right that this is the campaign that first brought large numbers of professional managers and advertising people into politics, among them Clem Whitaker Jr. and Leone Baxter, and thereby took the direction of elections from the parties and the candidates and delivered them to public relations experts (who would themselves be replaced by even more narrowly specialized campaign consultants, direct mail operatives and media experts). The fact that Frank Merriam, the Republican incumbent, was universally regarded as an old hack—he had been Lieutenant Governor and became Governor only that June when his predecessor died—probably made the professional takeover all the more certain.

Even political use of film and radio wasn't new. The Metropolitan Water District of Southern California had used it in 1931 to warn voters—another familiar theme—that if they didn't back its bonds, Southern California would turn into a desert. Meanwhile, Franklin Roosevelt was showing how a politician could use radio, just as George Creel, the man Sinclair beat in the California primary (and who then campaigned against him in the general election), had, as Woodrow Wilson's propagandist during World War I, shown how film and other media could be used to manipulate public opinion. And then, of course, there were Hitler, Goebbels and Mussolini. . . .

If Mitchell's engrossing and thorough book has any real flaw, it is that it is focused too narrowly. Because he is justifiably fascinated by the anti-Sinclair campaign, he tells less about Sinclair's own strategy and almost nothing about how Sinclair won the primary. We know about the contributions of one or two wealthy people, and we know how the local EPICs raised money by selling the *EPIC News* and what their fliers and pamphlets said. We watch Sinclair at the rallies and listen to him on the radio, but if that's all the organization there was—if that was the campaign—then Sinclair was bound to lose.

In the end, of course, lose he did. He got 900,000 votes, twice what any previous Democratic candidate had ever received, but Merriam got 1.1 million and Haight 300,000. And yet, as a movement, EPIC had its impact, even though the local EPICs themselves would quickly disappear. Two dozen EPIC-backed candidates won seats in the State Assembly (among them Gus Hawkins, who retired from Congress only last year after nearly sixty years in public office), not enough to win control from the Republicans but enough to make it close. (One who lost was Jerry Voorhis, who, as a member of Congress a dozen years later, would get his own taste of dirty politics from a real pro named Nixon.) More important, as a movement EPIC no doubt helped drive the hitherto uncertain New Deal to the left, and much other American politics along with it. The result of the election, said A.P. Giannini, the feisty head of the Bank of America, was "nothing short of amazing. . . . You can't tell me there isn't something wrong somewhere when a man like Sinclair without any newspaper support can get nearly a million votes." A social security system, he said, just had to come.

And yet the EPIC campaign was also thoroughly Californian, part of a tradition of antipolitics and populism that goes back at least to the earliest days of Hiram Johnson in the first decade of this century and forward to the latest incarnation of Jerry Brown. Perhaps no state in the union has so consistently perceived its politics as a great melodrama pitting the "interests"—the Southern Pacific Railroad, the big banks, the landholders, the utilities and their captive pols—against "the people." In that sense, the "campaign of the century" was like many others, only more so. □

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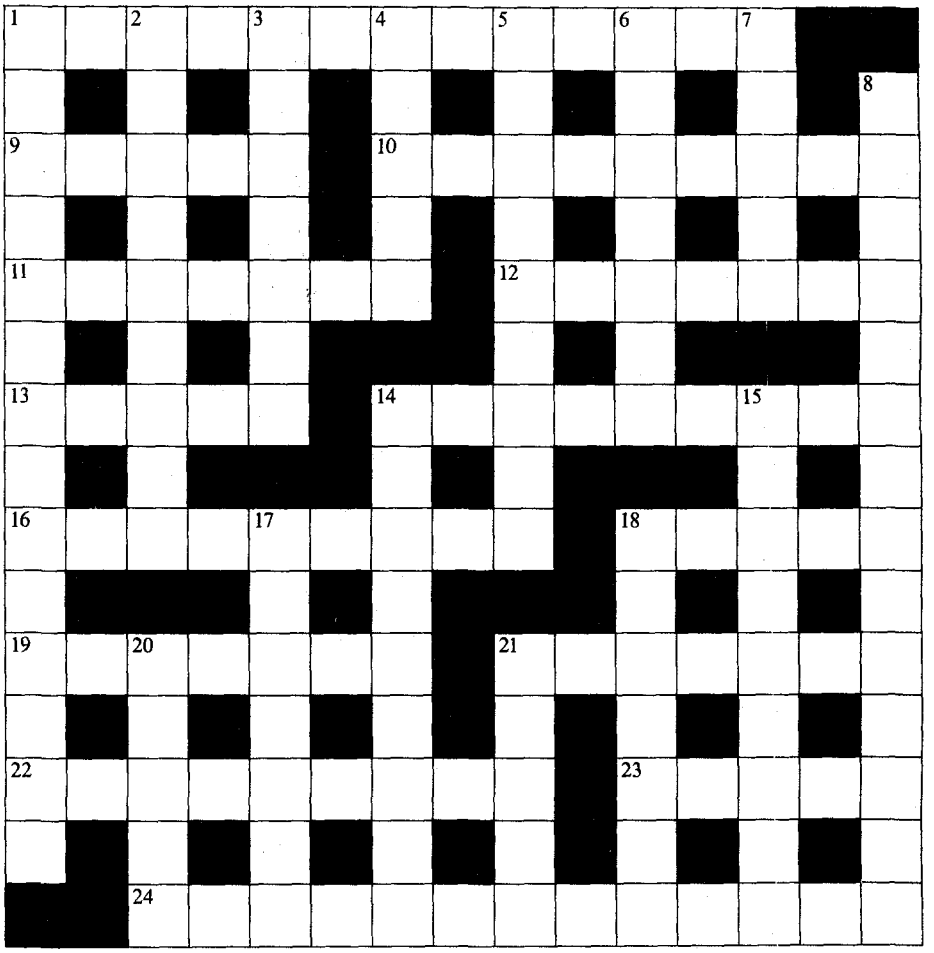

ACROSS

1 Bands consume something one is probably down front. (9,4)
9 and 10 Galatea, of a sort, suggests telling the girl not to work hard. (5,9)
11 Vikings, possibly, moved to Oakland? (7)
12 Where you might include something to eat, if tidy. (2,5)
13 After-livers, according to the Bard. (5)
14 It's very simple to describe such as earth and fire (or a wrigley eel on the mind!). (9)
16 Self-assertive, when the way things are supposed to go in the night is out, perhaps. (9)
18 One level achieved by the players? (5)
19 Describing what any counter probably deals with. (7)
21 Where the ruins make a splendid display, with the direction going one on one. (7)
22 One's inside another country, being a lot of islands. (9)
23 Being only partly pure, singulary inflammable vegetable solid. (5)
24 Is something like the black hole a problem? Duck, rather. (5,3,5)

DOWN

1 On what hears me, sort of bad with a border state, and it makes something to feed, if you have money. (3-5,6)
2 What one may sometimes justify, if constructive. (9)
3 Old forms of public transportation are about the things that are said never to hurt me like protective covers. (7)
4 They take their turns a couple of times a day. (5)
5 The kind on the dressing table are not the sort that have deadly droppings. (9)
6 One part of the story involves pies, and a poem on them. (7)
7 Carried in a bag, or just what the singer did to barge in here. (5)
8 The loyalty of such as Smokey—although we might be asked to do it as a pledge. (4,10)
14 Sex or dice might have caused it! And the way they got the devil out! (9)
15 Painting, for example, arises with poetry and crosses over. (9)
17 In toto, Reagan should remain in Canada! (7)
18 A rum is a bad concoction, even for an old warrior! (7)
20 Get things like newspapers, and you'll get a dime in change! (5)
21 Only part of what's on the fruit counter might be cheap! (5)

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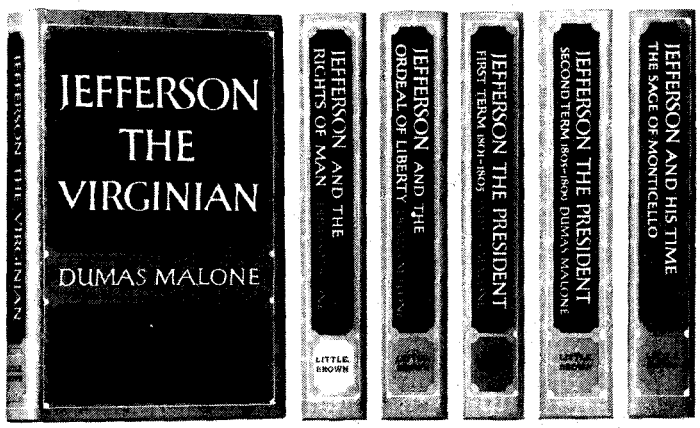
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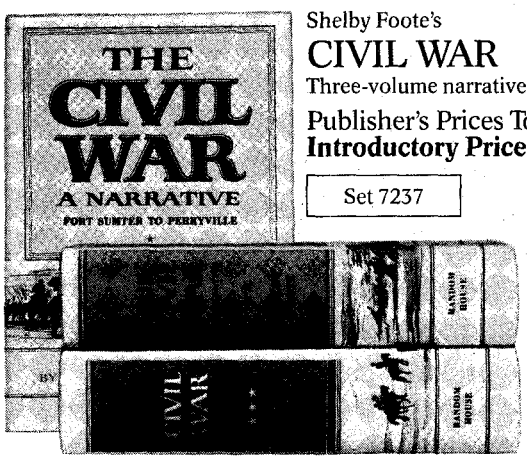

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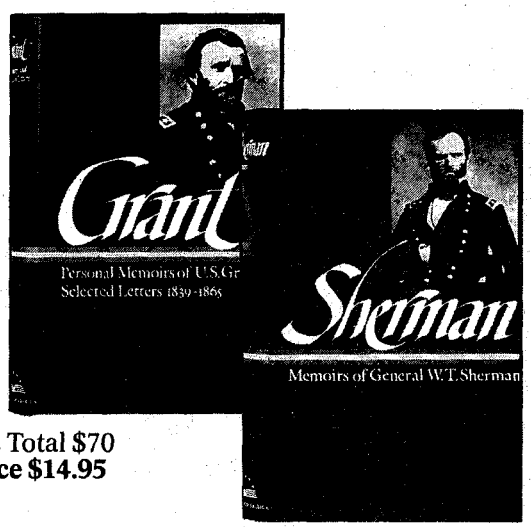

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